THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

· ELINOR GLYN ·

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Elinor Glyn

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THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

I have wondered sometimes if there are not perhaps some disadvantages in having really blue blood in one's veins, like grandmamma and me. For instance, if we were ordinary, common people our teeth would chatter naturally with cold when we have to go to bed without fires in our rooms in December; but we pretend we like sleeping in "well-aired rooms"—at least I have to. Grandmamma simply says we are obliged to make these small economies, and to grumble would be to lose a trick to fate.

"Rebel if you can improve matters," she often tells me, "but otherwise accept them with calmness."

We have had to accept a good many things with calmness since papa made that tiresome speculation in South America. Before that we had a nice apartment in Paris and as many fires as we wished. However, in spite of the comfort, grandmamma hated papa's "making" money. It was not the career of a gentleman, she said, and when the smash came and one heard no more of papa, I have an idea she was almost relieved.

We came first over to England, and, after long wanderings backward and forward, took this little furnished place at the corner of Ledstone Park. It is just a cottage—once a keeper's, I believe—and we have only Hephzibah and a wretched servant-girl to wait on us. Hephzibah

was my nurse in America before we ever went to Paris, and she is as ugly as a card-board face on Guy Fawkes day, and as good as gold.

Grandmamma has had a worrying life. She was brought up at the court of Charles X.—can one believe it, all those years ago!—her family up to that having lived in Ireland since the great Revolution. Indeed, her mother was Irish, and I think grandmamma still speaks French with an accent. (I hope she will never know I said that.) Her name was Mademoiselle de Calincourt, the daughter of the Marquis de Calincourt, whose family had owned Calincourt since the time of Charlemagne or something before that. So it was annoying for them to have had their heads chopped off and to be obliged to live in Dublin on nothing a year. The grandmother of grandmamma, Ambrosine Eustasie de Calincourt, after whom I am called, was a famous character. She was so good-looking that Robespierre offered to let her retain her head if she would give him a kiss, but she preferred to drive to the guillotine in the cart with her friends, only she took a rose to keep off the smell of the common people, and, they say, ran up the steps smiling. Grandmamma has her miniature, and it is, she says, exactly like me.

I have heard that grandmamma's marriage with grandpapa—an Englishman—was considered at the time to be a very suitable affair. He had also ancestors since before Edward the Confessor. However, unfortunately, a few years after their marriage (grandmamma was really *un peu passée* when that took place) grandpapa made a *bêtise* —something political or diplomatic, but I have never heard exactly what; anyway, it obliged them to leave hurriedly and go to America. Grandmamma never speaks of her life there or of grandpapa, so I suppose he died, because when I first remember things we were crossing to

France in a big ship—just papa, grandmamma, and I. My mother died when I was born. She was an American of one of the first original families in Virginia; that is all I know of her. We have never had a great many friends—even when we lived in Paris—because, you see, as a rule people don't live so long as grandmamma, and the other maids of honor of the court of Charles X. were all buried years ago. Grandmamma was eighty-eight last July! No one would think it to look at her. She is not deaf or blind or any of those annoying things, and she sits bolt-upright in her chair, and her face is not very wrinkled—more like fine, old, white kid. Her hair is arranged with such a *chic;* it is white, but she always has it a little powdered as well, and she wears such becoming caps, rather like the pictures of Madame du Deffand. They are always of real lace—I know, for I have to mend them. Some of her dresses are a trifle shabby, but they look splendid when she puts them on, and her eyes are the eyes of a hawk, the proudest eyes I have ever seen. Her third and little fingers are bent with rheumatism, but she still polishes her nails and covers the rest of her hands with mittens. You can't exactly love grandmamma, but you feel you respect her dreadfully, and it is a great honor when she is pleased.

I was twelve when we left Paris, and I am nineteen now. We have lived on and off in England ever since, part of the time in London—that was dull! All those streets and faces, and no one to speak to, and the mud and the fogs!

During those years we have only twice had glimpses of papa—the shortest visits, with long talks alone with grandmamma and generally leaving by the early train.

He seems to me to be rather American, papa, and very coarse to be the son of grandmamma; but I must say I

have always had a sneaking affection for him. He never takes much notice of me—a pat on the head when I was a child, and since an awkward kiss, as if he was afraid of breaking a bit of china. I feel somehow that he does not share all of grandmamma's views; he seems, in fact, like a person belonging to quite another world than ours. If it was not that he has the same nose and chin as grandmamma, one would say she had bought him somewhere, and that he could not be her own son.

Hephzibah says he is good-natured, so perhaps that is why he made a *bêtise* in South America. One ought never to be called good-natured, grandmamma says—as well write one's self down a noodle at once. While we were in Paris we hardly ever saw papa either; he was always out West in America, or at Rio, or other odd places. All we knew of him was, there was plenty of money to grandmamma's account in the bank.

Grandmamma has given me most of my education herself since we came to England, and she has been especially particular about deportment. I have never been allowed to lean back in my chair or loll on a sofa, and she has taught me how to go in and out of a room and how to enter a carriage. We had not a carriage, so we had to arrange with footstools for the steps and a chair on top of a box for the seat. That used to make me laugh!—but I had to do it—into myself. As for walking, I can carry any sized bundle on my head, and grandmamma says she has nothing further to teach me in that respect, and that I have mastered the fact that a gentlewoman should give the impression that the ground is hardly good enough to tread on. She has also made me go through all kinds of exercises to insure suppleness, and to move from the hips. And the day she told me she was pleased I shall never forget.

There are three things, she says, a woman ought to look —straight as a dart, supple as a snake, and proud as a tiger-lily.

Besides deportment, I seem to have learned a lot of stuff that I am sure no English girls have to bother about, and I probably am unacquainted with half the useful, interesting things they know.

We brought with us a beautifully bound set of French classics, and we read Voltaire one day, and La Bruyère the next, and Pascal, and Fontenelle, and Molière, and Fénelon, and the sermons of Bossuet, and since I have been seventeen the *Maximes* of La Rochefoucauld. Grandmamma dislikes Jean Jacques; she says he helped the Revolution, and she is all for the *ancien régime*. But in all these books she makes me skip what I am sure are the nice parts, and there are whole volumes of Voltaire that I may not even look into. For herself grandmamma has numbers of modern books and papers. She says she must understand the times. Besides all these things I have had English governesses who have done what they could to drum a smattering of everything into my head, but we never were able to afford very good ones after we left Paris.

I do wonder and wonder at things sometimes: what it would be like to be rich, for instance, and to have brothers and sisters and friends; and what it would be like to have a lover *à l'anglaise*. Grandmamma would think that dreadfully improper until after one was married, but I believe it would be rather nice, and perhaps one could marry him, too. However, there is not much chance of my getting one, or a husband either, as I have no *dot*.

We have an old friend, the Marquis de Rochermont, who pays us periodical visits. I believe long ago he was grandmamma's lover. They have such beautiful manners

together, and their conversation is so interesting, one can fancy one's self back in that dainty world of the engravings of Moreau le Jeune and Freudenberg which we have. They are as gay and witty as if they were both young and his feet were not lumpy with gout and her hands crooked with rheumatism. They discuss morals and religion, and, above all, philosophy, and I have learned a great deal by listening. And for morals, it seems one may do what one pleases as long as one behaves like a lady. And for religion, the first thing is to conform to the country one lives in and to conduct one's self with decency. As for Philosophy (I put a great big "P" to that, for it appears to be the chief)—Philosophy seems to settle everything in life, and enables one to take the ups and downs of fate, the good and the bad, with a smiling face. I mean to study it always, but I dare say it will be easier when I am older.

On the days when Monsieur de Rochermont comes grandmamma wears the lavender silk for dinner and the best Alençon cap, and Hephzibah stays so long dressing her that I often have to help the servant to lay the table for dinner. The Marquis never arrives until the afternoon, and leaves within a couple of days. I am sent to bed early on those evenings.

Each time the Marquis brings a present of game or fine fruit for grandmamma and a box of bonbons for me. I don't like sweets much, but the boxes are charming. These visits happen twice a year, in June and December, wherever we happen to be.

The only young men in this part of the world are the curate and two hobbledehoys, the sons of a person who lives in the place beyond Ledstone, and they are common and uninteresting and *parvenu*. All these people came to

call as soon as we arrived, and parsons and old maids by the dozen, but grandmamma's exquisite politeness upsets them. I suppose they feel that she considers they are not made of the same flesh and blood as she is, so we never get intimate with anybody whatever places we are in.

Hephzibah has a lover. You can get one in that class no matter how ugly you are, it seems, and he is generally years and years younger than you are. Hephzibah's is the man who comes round with the grocer's cart for orders, and he is young enough to be her son. I have seen them talking when I have been getting the irons hot to iron grandmamma's best lace. Hephzibah's face, which is a grayish yellow generally, gets a pale beet-root up to her ears, and she looks so coy. But I dare say it feels lovely to her to stand there at the back door and know some one is interested in what she does and says.

Ledstone Park is owned by some people of the name of Gurrage—does not it sound a fat word! They are a mother and son, but they have been at Bournemouth ever since we came, six months ago. It is a frightful place, and although it is miles in the country it looks like a suburban villa; the outside is all stucco, and nasty, common-looking pots and bad statues ornament the drive. They pulled down the smaller original Jacobean house that was there when they bought the place, we have heard. They are coming home soon, so perhaps we shall see them, but I can't think Gurrage could be the name of really nice people. The parson of the church came to call at once, but grandmamma nearly made him spoil his hat, he fidgeted with it so, and he hardly dared to ask for more than one subscription—she is so beautifully polite, and she often is laughing in her sleeve. She says so few people can see the comic side of things and that it is a great gift

and chases away foolish *migraines*. I think she has a grand scheme in her head for me, and that is what we are saving up every penny for.

Grandpapa's people lived in the next county to this, in a place called Dane Mount. He was a younger son and in the diplomatic service before he made his *bêtise*, but if he was alive now he would be over a hundred years old, so during that time the family has naturally branched off a good deal, and we can't be said to be very nearly related to them. The place was not entailed, and went with the female line into the Thornhirst family, who live there now. They are rather new baronets, created by George II. However, I believe grandmamma's scheme is for us to become acquainted with them, and for me to marry whichever of them is the right age. The present baronet's name is Sir Antony; it is a pretty name, I think. How this is to come about I do not know, and of course I dare not question grandmamma.

How I wish it was summer again! I hate these damp, cold days, and the east winds, and the darkness. I wish I might stay in bed until eleven, as grandmamma does. We have our chocolate at seven, which Hephzibah brings up, and then when I am dressed I practise for an hour; after that there are the finishing touches to be put to our sitting-room, and the best Sèvres and the miniatures to be dusted. Grandmamma would not trust any one to do it but me, but by ten I can get out for a walk.

It used to be dreadfully tiresome until we came here, because I was never allowed to go out without Hephzibah, and she was so busy we never got a chance in the morning, but since we came here I have had such a pleasure. A dear, clever collie for a friend—we got him from the lost dogs' home, and no one can know the joy he is to me. Grandmamma considers him a kind of chaperon, and I am

allowed to go alone for quite long walks now, and when we are out of sight and no one is looking we run, and it is such fun. Yesterday there was an excitement—the hunt passed! It is the first time I have seen one close. That must be delightful to rush along on horseback! I could feel my heart beating just looking at them, and my dear Roy barked all the time, and if I had not held his collar I am sure he would have joined the other dogs to go and catch the fox. Some of the men in their red coats looked so handsome, and there was one all covered with mud; he must have had a tumble. His stirrup-leather gave way just as he got up to the mound where Roy and I were standing, and he was obliged to get off his horse and settle it. I am sure by his face he was swearing to himself at being delayed. His fall had evidently broken some strap and he was fumbling in his pocket for a knife to mend it.

I always wear a little gold chatelaine that belonged to Ambrosine Eustasie de Calincourt and is marked with her coronet and initials; it has a tiny knife among the other things hanging from it. The muddy hunter could not find one; he searched in every pocket. At last he turned to me and said: "Do you happen to have a knife by chance?" and then when he saw I was a girl he took off his hat. It was gray with clay, and so was half of his face, and it looked so comic I could not help smiling as I caught his one eye; the other was rather swollen. The one that was visible was a grayish-greenish-blue eye with a black edge. I quickly gave him my knife and he laughed as he took it. "Yes, I do look a guy, don't I?" he said, and we both laughed again. Even through the mud one could see he was a gentleman. He fixed his stirrup so quickly and neatly, but it broke the blade of my little gold knife.

He apologized profusely, and said he must have it

mended, and where should he send it?—but at that moment there was the sound of the hunt coming across a field near again. He had no time for more manners, but jumped on his horse and was off in a few seconds—and alas! my knife went with him! And just as I was turning to go home I picked up the broken blade, which was lying in the road. I hope grandmamma won't notice it and ask about it. As I said before, there are disadvantages in being well born—one cannot tell lies like servants.

CHAPTER II

The Gurrage family have arrived. We saw carts and a carriage going to meet them at the station. Their liveries are prune and scarlet, and look so inharmonious, and they seem to have crests and coats of arms on every possible thing. Young Mr. Gurrage is our landlord—but I think I said that before.

On Sunday in church the party entered the Ledstone family pew. An oldish woman with a huddled figure—how unlike grandmamma!—looking about the class of a housekeeper; a girl of my age, with red hair and white eyelashes and a buff hat on; and a young man, dark, thick, common-looking. He seemed kind to his mother, though, and arranged a cushion for her. Their pew is at right angles to the one I sit in, so I have a full view of them all the time. He has box-pleated teeth—which seem quite unnecessary when dentists are so good now. No one would have missed at least four of them if they had been pulled out when he was a boy. His eyes are wishy-washy in spite of being brown, and he looks as if he did not have enough sleep. They were all three self-conscious and conscious of other people. Grandmamma says in a public place, unless the exigencies of politeness require one to come into personal contact with people, one ought never to be aware that there is anything but tables and chairs about. I have not once in my life seen her even glance around, and yet nothing escapes her hawk eye. Coming out they passed me on the path to the church gate, and Mrs. Gurrage stopped, and said:

"Good-mornin', me dear; you must be our new tenant at the cottage."

Her voice is the voice of quite a common person and has the broad accent of some county—I don't know which.

I was so astonished at being called "me dear" by a stranger that for half a second I almost forgot grandmamma's maxim of "let nothing in life put you out of countenance." However, I did manage to say:

"Yes, I am Miss Athelstan."

Then the young man said, "I hope you find everything to your liking there, and that my agent has made things comfortable."

"We are quite pleased with the cottage," I said.

"Well, don't stand on ceremony," the old woman continued. "Come up and see us at The Hall whenever you like, me dear, and I'll be round callin' on your grandma one of these days soon, but don't let that stop her if she likes to look in at me first."

"I thought of grandmamma "looking in" on this person, and I could have laughed aloud; however, I managed to say, politely, that my grandmother was an aged lady and somewhat rheumatic, and as we had not a carriage I hoped Mrs. Gurrage would excuse her paying her respects in person.

"Rheumatic, is she? Well, I have the very thing for the j'ints. My still-room maid makes it under my own directions. I'll bring some when I call. Good-day to you, me dear," and they bustled on into the arms of the parson's family and other people who were waiting to give them a gushing welcome at the gate.

Grandmamma laughed so when I told her about them!

Two days afterwards Mrs. Gurrage and Miss Hoad (the red-haired girl is the niece) came to call.

Grandmamma was seated as usual in the old Louis XV *bergère,* which is one of our household gods. It does not go with the other furniture in the room, which is a

"drawing-room suite" of black and gold, upholstered with magenta, but we have covered that up as well as we can with pieces of old brocade from grandmamma's stored treasures.

After the first greetings were over and Mrs. Gurrage had seated herself in the other armchair, her knees pointing north and south, she began about the rheumatism stuff for the "j'ints."

"I can see by yer hands ye're a great sufferer," she said.

"Alas! madam, one of the penalties of old age," grandmamma replied, in her fine, thin voice.

Then Mrs. Gurrage explained just how the mixture was to be rubbed in, and all about it. During this I had been trying to talk to Miss Hoad, but she was so ill at ease and so taken up with looking round the room that we soon lapsed into silence. Presently I heard Mrs. Gurrage say —she also had been busy examining the room:

"Well, you have been good tenants, coverin' up the suite, but you've no call to do it. You wouldn't be likely to soil it much, and I always say when you let a house furnished, you can't expect it to continue without wear and tear; so don't, please, bother to cover it with those old things. Lor' bless me, it takes me back to see it! It was my first suite after I married Mr. Gurrage, and we had a pretty place on Balham Hill. We put it here because Augustus did not want anything the least shabby up at The Hall, and I take it kind of you to have cared for it so."

Grandmamma's face never changed; not the least twinkle came into her eye—she is wonderful. I could hardly keep from gurgling with laughter and was obliged to make quite an irritating rattle with the teaspoons. Grandmamma frowned at that.

By the end of the visit we had been invited to view all

the glories of The Hall. (The place is called Ledstone Park; The Hall, apparently, is Mrs. Gurrage's pet name for the house itself.) We would not find anything old or shabby there, she assured us.

When they had gone grandmamma said to me, in a voice that always causes my knees to shake, "Why did you not make a *révérence* to Mrs. Gurrage, may I ask?"

"Oh, grandmamma," I said, "courtesy to that person! She would not have understood in the least, and would only have thought it was the village 'bob' to a superior."

"My child,"—grandmamma's voice can be terrible in its fine distinctness—"my teaching has been of little avail if you have not understood the point, that one has *not* good manners for the effect they produce—but for what is due to one's self. This person—who, I admit, should have entered by the back door and stayed in the kitchen with Hephzibah—happened to be our guest and is a woman of years—and yet, because she displeased your senses you failed to remember that you yourself are a gentlewoman. What she thought or thinks is of not the smallest importance in the world, but let me ask you in the future to remember, at least, that you are my granddaughter."

A big lump came in my throat.

I hate the Gurrages!

The next day one of the old maids—a Miss Burton—arrived just as we were having tea. She was full of excitement at the return of the owners of Ledstone, and gave us a quantity of information about them in spite of grandmamma's aloofness from all gossip. It appears, even in the country in England, Mrs. Gurrage is considered quite an oddity, but every one knows and accepts her, because she is so charitable and gives hundreds to any scheme the great ladies start.

She was the daughter of a small publican in one of the southern counties, Miss Burton said, and married Mr. Gurrage, then a commercial traveller in carpets. (How does one travel in carpets?) Anyway, whatever that is, he rose and became a partner, and finally amassed a huge fortune, and when they were both quite old they got "Augustus." He was "a puny, delicate boy," to quote Miss Burton again, and was not sent to school—only to Cambridge later on. Perhaps that is what gives him that look of his things fitting wrong, and his skin being puffy and flabby, as if he had never been knocked about by other boys. My friend of the knife, even with his coating of mud, looked quite different.

Oh! I wonder if I shall ever know any people of one's own sort that one has not to be polite to against the grain because one happens to be one's self a lady. Perhaps there are numbers of nice people in this neighborhood, but they naturally don't trouble about us in our tiny cottage, and so we see practically nobody.

Just as Miss Burton was leaving Mr. Gurrage rode up. He tried to open the gate with the end of his whip, but he could not, and would have had to dismount only Miss Burton rushed forward to open it for him. Then he got down and held the bridle over his arm and walked up the little path.

"Send some one to hold my horse," he said to Hephzibah, who answered his ring at the door. I could hear, as the window was a little open and he has a loud voice.

"There is no one to send, sir," said Hephzibah, who, I am sure, felt annoyed. Two laborers happened to be passing in the road, and he got one of them to hold his horse, and so came in at last. He *is* unattractive when you see him in a room; he seemed blustering and yet ill at ease. But he did not thank us for keeping the suite

clean! He was awfully friendly, and asked us to make use of his garden, and, in fact, anything we wanted. I hardly spoke at all.

"You *have* made a snug little crib of it," he said, in such a patronizing voice—how I dislike sentences like that; I don't know whether or no they are slang (grandmamma says I use slang myself sometimes!), but "a snug little crib" does not please me. He took off his glove when I gave him some tea, and he has thick, common hands, and he fidgeted and bounced up if I moved to take grandmamma her cup, and said each time, "Allow me," and that is another sentence I do not like. In fact, I think he is a horrid young man, and I wish he was not our landlord. He actually squeezed my hand when he said good-bye. I had no intention of doing more than to make a bow, but he thrust his hand out so that I could not help it.

"*You'll* find your way up to Ledstone, anyway, won't you?" he said, with a sort of affectionate look.

Grandmamma found him insupportable, she told me when he was gone. She even preferred the mother.

The following week I was sent up to The Hall with Roy and grandmamma's card to return the visit. They were at home, unfortunately, and I had to leave my dear companion lying on the steps to wait for me. Such a fearful house! An enormous stained-glass window in the hall, the shape of a church window, only not with saints and angels in it; more like the pattern of a kaleidoscope that one peeps into with one eye, and then bunches of roses and silly daisies in some of the panes, which, I am sure, are unsuitable to a stained-glass window. There were ugly negro figures from Venice, holding plates, in the passage, and stuffed bears for lamps, and such a look of newness about everything! I was taken along to Mrs. Gurrage's "budwar," as she called it. That was a room to

remember! It had a "suite" in it like the one at the cottage, only with Louis XV legs and Louis XVI backs, and a general expression of distortion, and all of the newest gilt-and-crimson satin brocade. And under a glass case in the corner was the top of a wedding-cake and a bunch of orange blossoms.

I was kept waiting about ten minutes, and then Mrs. Gurrage bustled in, fastening her cuff. I can't put down all she said, but it was one continual praise of "Gussie" and his wealth and the jewels he had given her, and how disappointed he would be not to see me. Miss Hoad poured out the tea and giggled twice. I think she must be what Hephzibah calls "wanting." At last I got away. Roy barked with pleasure as we started homeward.

We had not gone a hundred yards before we met Mr. Gurrage coming up the drive. He insisted upon turning back and walking with me. He said it was "beastly hard luck"—he has horrid phrases—his being out when I came, and would I please not to walk so fast, as we should so soon arrive at the cottage, and he wanted to talk to me. I simply pranced on after that. I do not know why people should want to talk to one when one does not want to talk to them. I was not agreeable, but he did all the speaking. He told me he belonged to the Yeomanry and they were "jolly fellows" and were going to give a ball soon at Tilchester—the county town nearest here—and that I must let his mother take me to it. It was to be a send-off to the detachment which had volunteered.

A ball! Oh! I should like to go to a ball. What could it feel like, I wonder, to dance all the evening? Would grandmamma ever let me? Oh! it made my heart beat. But suddenly a cold dash came—I could not go with a person like Mrs. Gurrage. I would rather stay at home than that. When we got to the gate I said good-bye

and gave him two fingers, but he was not the least daunted, and, seizing all my hand, said:

"Now, don't send me away; I want to come in and see your grandmother."

There was nothing left for me to do, and he followed me into the house and into the drawing-room.

Grandmamma was sitting as usual in her chair. She does not have to fluster in, buttoning her cuff, when people call.

"Mr. Gurrage wishes to see you, grandmamma," I said, as I kissed her hand, and then I left them to take off my hat and I did not come down again until I heard the front door shut.

"That is a terrible young man, Ambrosine," grandmamma said, when I did return to the drawing-room. "How could you encourage him to walk back with you?"

"Indeed, grandmamma, I did not wish him to come; he did not even ask my leave; he just walked beside me."

"Well, well," grandmamma said, and she raised my face in her hands. I was sitting on a low stool so as to get the last of the light for my embroidery. She pushed the hair back from my forehead—I wear it brushed up like Ambrosine Eustasie de Calincourt—and she looked and looked into my eyes. If possible there was something pained and wistful in her face. "My beautiful Ambrosine," she said, and that was all. I felt I was blushing all over my cheeks. "Beautiful Ambrosine." Then it must be true if grandmamma said it. I had often thought so—perhaps—myself, but I was not sure if other people might think so too.

It is six weeks now since the Gurrages returned, and constantly, oh! but constantly has that young man come across my path. I think I grow to dislike him more as

time goes on. He is so persistent and thick of ideas, and he *always* does things in the wrong place. I feel afraid to go for my walks, as he seems to be loitering about. I sneak out of the back door and choose the most secluded lanes, but it does not matter; he somehow turns up. Certainly three times a week do I have to put up with his company in one way or another. It is a perfect insult to think of such a person as an admirer, and I annihilated Hephzibah, who had the impertinence to suggest such a thing to me when she was brushing my hair a few days ago. The ball is coming off, but grandmamma has not seemed very well lately. It is nothing much, just a bluish look round her mouth, but I fear perhaps she will not be fit to go. When the invitation came—brought down by Mrs. Gurrage in person—grandmamma said she never allowed me to go out without herself, but she would be very pleased to take me. I was perfectly thunderstruck when I heard her say it. She—grandmamma—going out at night! It was so good of her, and when I thanked her afterwards, all she said was, "I seldom do things without a reason, Ambrosine."

Oh, the delight in getting my dress! We hired the fly from the Crown and Sceptre and Hephzibah drove with me into Tilchester with a list of things to get, written out by grandmamma—these were only the small et ceteras; the dress itself is to come from Paris! I was frightened almost at the dreadful expense, but grandmamma would hear nothing from me. "My granddaughter does not go to her first ball arrayed like a *provinciale*," she told me. I do not know what it is to be, she did not consult me, but I feel all jumping with excitement when I think of it. Only four days more before the ball, and the box from Paris is coming to-morrow.

The Gurrages are to have a large party—some cousins

and friends. I am sure they will not be interesting. They asked us to dine and go on with them, but grandmamma said that would be too fatiguing for her, and we are going straight from the cottage. I do not quite know what has happened. A few days ago, after lunch, grandmamma had a kind of fainting fit. It frightened me terribly, and the under-servant ran for the doctor. She had revived when he came, and she sent me out of the room at once, and saw him alone without even Hephzibah. He stayed a very long time, and when he came down he looked at me strangely and said:

"Your grandmother is all right now and you can go to her. I think she wishes to send a telegram, which I will take."

He then asked to see Hephzibah, and I ran quickly to grandmamma. She was sitting perfectly upright as usual, and, except for the slight bluish look round her mouth, seemed quite herself. She made me get her the foreign telegram forms, and wrote a long telegram, thinking between the words, but never altering one. She folded it and told me to get some money from Hephzibah and take it to the doctor. Her eyes looked prouder than ever, but her hand shook a little. A vague feeling of fear came over me which has never left me since. Even when I am excited thinking of my dress, I seem to feel some shadow in the background.

Yesterday grandmamma received a telegram and told me we might expect the Marquis de Rochermont by the usual train in the evening, and at six he arrived. He greeted me with even extra courtesy and made me compliment. I cannot understand it all—he has never before come so early in the year (this is May). What can it mean? Grandmamma sent me out of the room directly, and we did not have dinner until eight o'clock. I could

hear their voices from my room, and they seemed talking very earnestly, and not so gayly as usual.

At dinner the Marquis, for the first time, addressed his conversation to me. He prefers to speak in English—to show what a linguist he is, I suppose. He made me many compliments, and said how very like I was growing to my ancestress, Ambrosine Eustasie de Calincourt, and he told me again the old story of the guillotine. Grandmamma seemed watching me.

"Ambrosine is a true daughter of the race," she said. "I think I could promise you that under the same circumstances she would behave in the same manner."

How proud I felt!

CHAPTER III

How changed all the world can become in one short day! Now I know why the Marquis came, and what all the mystery was about. This morning after breakfast grandmamma sent for me into the drawing-room. The Marquis was standing beside the fireplace, and they both looked rather grave.

"Sit down, my child," said grandmamma; "we have something to say to you."

I sat down.

"I said you were a true daughter of the race—therefore I shall expect you to obey me without flinching."

I felt a cold shiver down my back. What could it be?

"You are aware that I had a fainting fit a short time ago," she continued. "I have long known that my heart was affected, but I had hoped it would have lasted long enough for me to fulfil a scheme I had for a thoroughly suitable and happy arrangement of your destiny. It was a plan that would have taken time, and which I had hoped to put in the way of gradual accomplishment at this ball. However, we must not grumble at fate—it is not to be. The doctor tells me I cannot possibly live more than a few weeks, therefore it follows that something must be settled immediately to secure you a future. You are not aware, as I have not considered it necessary to inform you hitherto of my affairs, that all we are living on is an annuity your father bought for me, before the catastrophe to his fortunes. That, you will understand, ceases with my life. At my death you will be absolutely penniless, a beg-

gar in the street. Even were you to sell these trifles"—and she pointed to the Sèvres cups and the miniatures—"the few pounds they would bring might keep you from starving for perhaps a month or two—after that—well, enough—that question is impossible. I can obtain no news of your father. I have heard nothing from or of him for two years. He may be dead—we cannot count on him. In short, I have decided, after due consideration and consultation with my old friend the Marquis, that you must marry Augustus Gurrage. It is my dying wish."

My eyes fell from grandmamma's face and happened to light on the picture of Ambrosine Eustasie de Calincourt. There she was, with the rose in her dress, smiling at me out of the old paste frame. I was so stunned, all I could think of was to wonder if it was the same rose she walked up the guillotine steps with. I did not hear grandmamma speaking; for a minute there was a buzzing in my ears.

Marry Augustus Gurrage!

"My child"—grandmamma's voice was rather sharper—"I am aware that it is a *mésalliance,* a stain, a finish to our fine race, and if I could take you on the journey I am going I would not suggest this alternative to you; but one must have common-sense and be practical; and as you are young and must live, and cannot beg, this is the only certain and possible solution of the matter. The great honor you will do him by marrying him removes all sense of obligation in receiving the riches he will bestow on you—you yourself being without a *dot.* Child—why don't you answer?"

I got up and walked to the window. She had said I was a true daughter of the race. Would it be of the race to kill myself? No—there is nothing so vulgar as to be dramatic. Grandmamma has never erred. She

would not ask this of me if there was any other way.

I came back and sat down.

"Very well, grandmamma," I said.

The blue mark round her lips seemed to fade a little and she smiled.

The Marquis came forward and kissed my hand.

"Remember—*chère enfant,*" he said, "marriage is a state required by society. It is not a pleasure, but it can—with future comforts—become supportable, and it opens the door to freedom *et de tous les autres agréments de la vie pour une femme.*"

He kissed and patted my hand again.

"Start with hate, passionate love, indifference, revolt, disgust—what you will—all husbands at the end of a year inspire the same feeling, one of complacent monotony—that is, if they are not altogether brutes—and from the description of madame, *ce jeune* Gurrage is at least *un brave garçon.*"

I am of a practical nature, and a thought struck me forcibly. When could Mr. Gurrage have made the *demande?*

"How did Mr. Gurrage ask for my hand?" I ventured to question grandmamma.

She looked at the Marquis, and the Marquis looked back at her, and polished his eye-glasses.

At last grandmamma spoke.

"That is not the custom here, Ambrosine, but from what I have observed he will take the first opportunity of asking you himself."

Here was something unpleasant to look forward to! It would be bad enough to have to go through the usual period of formal *fiançailles* of the sort I have always been brought up to expect—but to endure being made love to by Augustus Gurrage! That was enough to daunt the

stoutest heart. However, having agreed to obey grandmamma, I could not argue. I only waited for directions. There was a pause, not agreeable to any of us, and then grandmamma spoke.

"You will go to this ball, my child. You will look beautiful, and you will dance with this young man. You will not be so stiff as you have hitherto been, and during the evening he is sure to propose to you. You will then accept him, and bear his outburst of affection with what good grace you can summon up. I will save you from as much as I can, and I promise you your engagement shall be short."

A sudden feeling of dizziness came over me. I have never been faint in my life, but all the room swam, and I felt I must scream, "No, no! I cannot do it!" Then my eyes fell again on grandmamma. The blue mark had returned, but she sat bolt upright. My nerves steadied. I, too, would be calm and of my race.

"Go for a walk now, my child," she said. "Take your dog and run; it will be good for you."

You may believe I courtesied quickly to them and left the room without more ado.

When I got out-of-doors and the fresh May air struck my face it seemed to revive me, and I forgot my ugly future and could think only of grandmamma—poor grandmamma, going away out of the world, and the summer coming, and the blue sky, and the flowers. Going away to the great, vast beyond—and perhaps there she will meet Ambrosine Eustasie de Calincourt, and all the other ancestors, and Jâcques de Calincourt, the famous friend of Bayard, who died for his lady's glove; and she will tell them that I also, the last of them, will try to remember their motto, *"Sans bruit,"* and accept my fate also "without noise."

When I got back, my ball-dress had arrived. Hephzibah had unpacked it, and it was lying on my bed—such billows of pure white!—and it fitted! Well, it gave me pleasure, with all the uglies looming in the future, just to try it on.

The Marquis stayed with us. He could not desert his old friend, he said, in her frail health, when she needed some one to cheer her. I suspect the Marquis is as poor as we are, really, and that is why grandmamma could not leave me to him. I am glad he is staying, and now she seems quite her old self again, and I cannot believe she is going to die. However, whether or no, my destiny is fixed, and I shall have to marry Augustus Gurrage.

I did not let myself think of what was to happen at the ball. When one has made up one's mind to go through something unpleasant, there is no use suffering in advance by anticipation. I said to myself, "I will put the whole affair out of my head; there are yet two good days."

Chance, however, arranged otherwise. This morning, the morning of the ball, while I was dusting the drawing-room, I went to the window, which was wide open, to shake out my duster, and there, loitering by the gate, was Mr. Gurrage—at nine o'clock! What could he be doing? He jumped back as if he had seen me in my nightgown. I suppose it was because of my apron, and the big cambric cap I always wear to keep the dust from getting into my hair. A flash came to me—why not get it over now? He would probably not be so affectionate in broad daylight as at the ball. So I called out, "Good morning!"

He came forward up the pathway and leaned on the window-sill, still looking dreadfully uncomfortable, hardly daring to glance at me. Then he said, nervously

"What are you playing with, dressed up like that?"

"I am not playing," I said. "I am dusting the china, and I wear these things to keep me clean."

He *blushed!*

Then I realized all this embarrassment was because he thought I should feel uncomfortable at being caught doing house-work! Not, as one might have imagined, because *he* had been caught peeping into our garden. Oh, the odd ideas of the lower classes!

I took up a Sèvres cup and began to pull the silk duster gently through the handle.

"Er—can I help you?" he said.

At that I burst out laughing. Those thick, common hands touching grandmamma's best china!

"No, no!" I said.

He grew less self-conscious.

"By Jove! how pretty you are in that cap!"

"Am I?"

"Yes, and you are laughing, and not snubbing a fellow so dreadfully as you generally do."

"No?"

"No—well, I came round because I couldn't sleep. I haven't been able to sleep for three nights. I haven't seen you since Saturday, you know."

"No, I did not know."

My heart began to beat in a sickening fashion. He leaned close to me over the sill. I put down the cup and took up the miniature. I thought if I looked at Ambrosine Eustasie that would give me courage. I went on dusting it, and I was glad to see my hands did not shake.

"Yes, you are so devilishly tantalizing—I beg your pardon, but you don't chuck yourself at a fellow's head like the other girls."

I felt I was "chucking myself at his head"—horrible

phrase—at that very moment, but as speech is given us to conceal our thoughts, I said, "No, indeed!"

"Ambrosine—" (Oh, how his saying my name jarred and made me creep!) "Er—you know I am jolly fond of you. If you'll marry me you'll not have to dust any more beastly old china, I promise you."

I have never had a tooth out—fortunately, mine are all very white and sound—but I have always heard the agony goes on growing until the final wrench, and then all is over. I feel I know now what the sensation is. I could have screamed, but when he finished speaking I felt numb. I was incapable of answering.

"I've generally been able to buy all I've wanted," he went on, "but I never wanted a wife before." He laughed nervously. That was a straw for me.

"Do you want to buy me?" I said. "Because, if it is only a question of that, it perhaps could be managed."

"Oh, I say—I never meant that!" he blustered. "Oh, you know I love you like anything, and I want you to love me."

"That is just it," I said, quite low.

I felt too mean. I could not pretend I loved him. I must tell him the truth, and then, if he would not have me—me—Ambrosine de Calincourt Athelstan!—why, then, vulgarly dramatic or no, I should have to jump into the river to make things easy for grandmamma.

"What is 'just it'?" he asked.

"I do not love you."

His face fell.

"I kind of thought you didn't," he faltered, the bluster gone; "but"—cheering up—"of course you will in time, if you will only marry me."

"I don't think I ever shall," I managed to whisper;

"but if you like to marry me on that clear understanding, you may."

He climbed through the window and put his arms round me.

"Darling!" he said, and kissed me deliberately.

Oh, the horror of it! I shut my eyes, and in the emotion of the moment I bent the bow on the top of the frame of Ambrosine Eustasie.

Then, dragging myself from his embrace and stuttering with rage, "How dare you!" I gasped. "How dare you!"

He looked sulky and offended.

"You said you would marry me—what is a fellow to understand?"

"You are to understand that I will not be mauled and—kissed like—like Hephzibah at the back door," I said, with freezing dignity, my head in the air.

"Hoity-toity!" (hideous expression!) "What airs you give yourself! But you look so deuced pretty when you are angry!" I did not melt, but stood on the defensive.

He became supplicating again.

"Ambrosine, I love you—don't be cross with me. I won't make you angry again until you are used to me. Ambrosine, say you forgive me." He took my hand. His hands are horrid to touch—coarse and damp. I shuddered involuntarily.

He looked pained at that. A dark-red flush came over all his face. He squared his shoulders and got over the window-sill again.

"You cold statue!" he said, spitefully. "I will leave you."

"Go," was all I said, and I did not move an inch.

He stood looking at me for a few moments, then with

one bound he was in the room again and had seized me in his arms.

"No, I sha'n't!" he exclaimed. "You have promised, and I don't care what you say or do. I will keep you to your word."

Mercifully, at that moment Hephzibah opened the door, and in the confusion her entrance caused him, he let me go. I simply flew from the room and up to my own; and there, I am ashamed to say, I cried—sat on the floor and cried like a gutter-child. Oh, if grandmamma could have seen me, how angry she would have been! I have never been allowed to cry—a relaxation for the lower classes, she has always told me.

My face burned. All the bottles of Lubin in grandmamma's cupboard would not wash off the stain of that kiss, I felt. I scrubbed my face until it was crimson, and then I heard grandmamma's voice and had to pull myself together.

I have always said she had hawk's eyes; they see everything, even with the blinds down in her room. When I went in she noticed my red lids and asked the cause of them.

"Mr. Gurrage has been here and has asked me to marry him, grandmamma," I said.

"At this hour in the morning! What does this young man mean?"

"He saw me dusting the Sèvres from the road and came in."

Grandmamma kissed me—a thing of the greatest rareness.

"My child," she said, "try and remember to accept fate without noise. Now go and rest until breakfast, or you will not be pretty for your ball to-night."

The Marquis's congratulations were different when we met in the *salle à manger;* he kissed my hand. How cool and fine his old, withered fingers felt!

"You will be the most beautiful *débutante* to-night, *ma chère enfant,*" he said; "and all the *félicitations* are for Monsieur Gurrage. You are a noble girl—but such is life. My wife detested me—*dans le temps.* But what will you?"

"You, at least, were a gentleman, Marquis," I said.

"There is that, to be sure," he allowed. "But my wife preferred her dancing-master. One can never judge."

At half-past two o'clock (they must have gobbled their lunch), Mrs. Gurrage, Augustus—yes, I must get accustomed to saying that odious name—Augustus and Miss Hoad drove up in the barouche, and got solemnly out and came up to the door which Hephzibah held open for them. They solemnly entered the sitting-room where we all were, and solemnly shook hands. There is something dreadfully ill-behaved about me to-day. I could hardly prevent myself from screaming with laughter.

"I've heard the joyous news," Mrs. Gurrage said, "and I've come to take you to me heart, me dear."

Upon which I was folded fondly against a mosaic brooch containing a lock of hair of the late Mr. Gurrage.

It says a great deal for the unassailable dignity of grandmamma that she did not share the same fate. She, however, escaped with only numerous hand-shakings.

"He is, indeed, to be congratulated, *votre fils,* madame," the Marquis said, on being presented.

"And the young lady, too, me dear sir. A better husband than me boy'll make there is not in England—though his old mother says it."

Grandmamma behaved with the stiffest decorum. She

suggested that we—the young girls—should walk in the garden, while she had some conversation with Mrs. Gurrage and Augustus.

Miss Hoad and I left the room. Her name is Amelia. She looked like a turkey's egg, just that yellowish white with freckles.

"I hope you will be good to Gussie," she said, as we walked demurely along the path. "He is a dear fellow when you know him, though a bit masterful."

I bowed.

"Gussie's awfully spoony on you," she went on. "I said to aunt weeks ago I knew what was up," she giggled.

I bowed again.

"I say, he'll give you a bouquet for the ball to-night; we are going into Tilchester now to fetch it."

I could not bow a third time, so I said:

"Is not a bouquet rather in the way of dancing? I have never been to a ball yet."

"Never been to a ball? My! Well, I've never had a bouquet, so I can't say. If you have any one sweet on you I suppose they send them, but I have always been too busy with aunt to think about that."

Poor Miss Hoad!

When they had gone—I kept behind grandmamma's chair, and so only received a squeeze of the hand from my betrothed—grandmamma told me she would be obliged to forego the pleasure of herself taking me to the ball to-night, but the Marquis would accompany me, and Mrs. Gurrage would chaperon me there. So, after all, I am going with Mrs. Gurrage! Grandmamma also added that she had explained the circumstances of her health to them, and that Augustus had suggested that the wedding should take place with the shortest delay possible.

"I have told them your want of *dot*," she said, "and

I must say for these *bourgeois* they seemed to find that a matter of no importance. But they do not in the least realize the honor you are doing them. That must be for you as a private consolation. I have stipulated, as my time is limited, that I shall have you as much to myself as possible during the month that must elapse before you can collect a trousseau."

For that mercy, how grateful I felt to grandmamma!

CHAPTER IV

It is difficult to judge of a thing when your mind is prejudiced on any point. Balls may be delightful, but my first ball contained hours which I can only look back upon as a nightmare.

The Marquis and I arrived not too early; Mrs. Gurrage and her bevy of nieces and friends were already in the dressing-room. They seemed to be plainish, buxom girls, several of the bony, *passé* description. They looked at me with eyes of deep interest. My dress, as I said before, was perfection. Mrs. Gurrage wore what she told me were the "family jewels." Her short neck and undulating chest were covered with pearls, diamonds, sapphires, and rubies, all jumbled together, necklace after necklace. On top of her head, in front of an imitation lace cap, a park paling of diamonds sat up triumphantly; one almost saw its reflection in her shining forehead below. In spite of this splendor, my future mother-in-law had an unimportant, plebeian appearance, and as we walked down the corridor I wished I was not so tall, that I might hide behind her.

Augustus was waiting among the other men of their party with an enormous bouquet. Not one of those dainty posies with dropping sprays one sees in the Paris shops, but a good lump of flowers, arranged like a cauliflower, evidently the work of the Tilchester florist. How I should like to have thrown it at his head!

He gave me his arm, and in this fashion we entered the ballroom. A bride of the Saturday weddings in the

Bois de Boulogne could not have looked more foolish than I felt. A valse was being played; the room was full of light and color, all the officers of the Yeomanry in their pretty uniforms (Augustus puffed with pride in his), and a general air of gayety and animation that would have made my pulse skip a month ago. We passed on to the other end of the room in this ridiculous procession. I am quite as tall as Augustus, and I felt I was towering over him, my head was so high in the air—not with exaltation, but with a vague sense of defiance.

There were several nice-looking people standing around when at last we arrived on the dais. Mrs. Gurrage greeted most of them gushingly and introduced me.

"My future daughter-in-law, Miss Athelstan."

It may have been fancy, but I thought I caught flashes of surprise in their eyes. One lady—Lady Tilchester—the great magnate in the neighborhood, spoke to me. She had gracious, beautiful manners, and although she could not know anything about me or my history, there seemed to be sympathy in her big, brown eyes.

"This is your first ball, Mrs. Gurrage tells me," she said, kindly. "I hope you will enjoy it. I must introduce some of my party to you. Ah, they are dancing now; I must find them presently."

During this Augustus fidgeted. He kept touching my arm, half in an outburst of affection and half to keep my attention from wandering from him. He blustered politenesses to Lady Tilchester, who smiled vacantly while she was attending to something else. Then my *fiancé* suggested that we should dance. I agreed; it would be an opportunity to get rid of my cauliflower bouquet, which I flung viciously into a chair, and off we started.

Augustus dances vilely. When he was not bumping me against other *valseurs* he was treading on my toes—a jig

or a funeral-march might have been playing instead of a valse, for all the time of it mattered to him.

"I never dance fast, I hate it," he said, in the first pause; "don't you?"

"No! I like it—at least, I mean, I like to do whatever the music is doing," I answered, trying to keep my voice from showing the anger and disgust I felt.

"Darling!" was all he muttered, as he seized me round the waist again.

"Oh, it makes me giddy," I said, which was a lie I am ashamed of. "Let us stop."

It was from Scylla to Charybdis, for I was led to one of the sitting-out places. So stupidly ignorant was I in the ways of balls that I did not realize that we should be practically alone, or I would have remained glued to the ballroom. However, before I knew it we were seated on a sofa behind a screen, in a subdued light.

"Are you never going to give me a kiss, Ambrosine?" Augustus said, pleadingly.

"Certainly not here," I exclaimed. "How can you be so horrid?"

"You are a little vixen."

"You may call me what you like; I do not care. But you shall not make me a public disgrace," I retorted.

"I think you are deucedly unkind to me," he said, his sulky underlip pouting.

I controlled myself. I tried to remember grandmamma's last advice to me, to be as agreeable as possible and not come to a quarrel. She said I must even submit to a certain amount of familiarity from my betrothed. These were her words: "It is in the nature of men, my child, to wish to demonstrate by outward marks of affection their possession and appreciation of their *fiancées,* and, unfortunately, the English customs permit such an

amount of license in this direction that I fear you must submit to a little, at least, with a good grace."

I softened my voice. "I do not mean to be unkind," I said, "but it is all so very sudden. You must give me time to accustom myself to the idea of having a *fiancé*—you see, I have never had one before," and I tried to laugh.

He was slightly mollified.

"Well, at least let me hold your hand," he said.

I gave him a stiff, unsympathetic set of fingers, which he proceeded to kiss through the glove. My attention was so taken up with trying to see if any one was coming, to avoid the disgrace of being caught thus, that I had not even time to feel the nastiness of it.

Augustus was murmuring sentences of love all the time. It must have sounded like this:

"Darling, what a dear little paw!"

"Oh! is not that a lady looking this way?"

"I should like to kiss your arm——"

"I am sure they can see in here by that looking-glass."

"Why won't you let me kiss that jolly little curl on your neck?"

"I am certain some one is coming—oh!—oh!"

These "ohs" were caused by Augustus having got so beside himself that he actually bent down and kissed my shoulder!

A sudden sense of helplessness came over me. I felt crushed, as if I could not fight any more, as if all was ended.

"Good God! How white you are, darling! What is the matter?" I heard his voice saying, as if in a dream. "Come, let me take you to have some champagne."

I bounded up at that—I should get out of this cage. In the refreshment-room some of the other Yeomen were

standing with their partners. The dance was over and they came up, and Augustus introduced several of them, and, mercifully, I was soon engaged to dance for numbers ahead. Neither their faces nor their conversation made the slightest impression on me. These were the "jolly fellows," I suppose, but I felt grateful to them for taking up my time, and I talked as gayly as I could, and one or two of them danced nicely. Between the dances there was Augustus waiting for me. But I soon found it was the custom to stay with one's partner until the next dance began, and so after that I hid in every possible place for the intervals, and then took refuge with the Marquis. Presently there was a set of lancers. Augustus rushed up to me before I could hide.

"I don't care who you are engaged to," he said, savagely. "You must dance this with me. I have been deuced patient these last four dances, but I won't stand being chucked like this any longer."

"I am not engaged to any one," I said, stiffly.

He tucked my hand under his arm and dragged me to where a set was forming, but on the way Lady Tilchester beckoned us to the middle. We took our position at one of the sides of her set. Augustus was so flattered at this notice that he forgot to grumble further at my long absence.

Except ourselves, the rest of the sixteen people appeared to be all of her party, and they looked so gay and seemed enjoying themselves; I am afraid grandmamma would have said they romped, rather. Our *vis-à-vis* were such a pretty girl and a very tall man, and when first he advanced to meet us I felt I had seen him before, and by the second figure I knew it was my friend of the knife. He is very good-looking without the mud. Not the least expression of recognition came into his face, but he laughed gayly at the fun of the thing. After the

mad whirl of a *chassé,* instead of a ladies' chain I have been accustomed to, we came to an end. This dance was the first moment of the evening I had enjoyed. All these people interested me; they seemed of another world, a world where grandmamma and I could live happily if we might. They made quite a noise, and they danced badly, but there was nothing vulgar or *bourgeois* about them. I felt like an animal who sees its own kind again, after captivity; I wanted to break away and join them. Augustus, on the contrary, was extremely ill at ease.

After that, one dance succeeded another—numbers of which I had to spend with my *fiancé,* but, warned by my first experience, I always pretended a great thirst, or a desire to see the rooms, or an obligation to return to the Marquis, and so went to no more sitting-out places. I did not again see the tall man—he seemed to have disappeared until a dance after supper, when we met him with Lady Tilchester.

"Ah! here you are," she said. "I have been wanting to find you to introduce—" At that moment an old gentleman guffawed loudly near us, and so I did not catch the name she said, but we bowed, and the tall man asked me if I would dance that one with him.

Without the least hesitation I disengaged my hand from the arm of Augustus (he likes to walk thus on every occasion), and said, "Yes."

"Oh! I say," said my *fiancé,* with the savage look in his face, "you were going to dance with me."

Then Lady Tilchester interfered—what a dear and kind soul she must have! She said so sweetly, as if Augustus was a prince, "Won't you accept me as a substitute, Mr. Gurrage?"

Augustus was overcome with pride, and relinquished me with the best grace.

Now it was really bliss, dancing with this man; we swam along, swift and smoothly. I could no longer see the walls; a maze of lights was all my vision grasped—I felt bewildered—happy. We stopped a moment and he bent down and smiled at me.

"You look as if you liked dancing," he said. "Poor Lady Tilchester is being mauled by that bear in your place."

I laughed. "I love dancing."

"I seldom do this sort of thing," he continued, "but you are a beautiful mover," and we began again.

When it was over we went and sat down in the very alcove of my first dance with Augustus. I had no uneasiness this time!

I can't say what there was about my partner—a whimsical humor, a slight mocking sound in his voice, which pleased me; he took nothing seriously; everything he said was as light as a thistle-down; he reminded me of the wit of grandmamma and the Marquis; we got on beautifully.

"I seem to have seen you before," he said, at last. "Have I met you in Paris? or am I only dreaming? because I know you so well in the galleries at Versailles—you stepped down from those frames just to honor us tonight, did you not?—and you will go back at cock-crow!"

"If I only could!"

He asked me if I was staying at Brackney or Henchhurst, and when I said no, that I lived only a few miles off, he seemed so surprised.

His brown hair crimps nicely and is rather gray above the ears, but he does not look very old, perhaps not more than thirty-five or so, and now that one can see both his eyes, one realizes that they are rather attractive. A grayish, greeny-blue, with black edges, and such black eyelashes! They are as clear as clear, and I am sure he is

a cat and can see in the dark. He laughed at some of the people, even the ones who think themselves great, and he made me feel that he and I were the same and on a plane by ourselves, which was delightful. All this time I did not know his name, nor he mine. As he moved I saw a gold chain in the pocket of his white waistcoat, and just peeping out was the hilt of my little lost knife. I said nothing—I don't know why—it pleased me to see it there. He had been away in the smoking-room most of the evening, he said, playing bridge.

The Marquis is teaching it to grandmamma out of a book, but I do not care for cards—and it seemed to me such a dull way to spend a ball. I told him so.

"I like this better," he said, quite simply, "but then at most balls one does not meet a dainty marquise out of the eighteenth century. Let me see, was there not a story of the great Dumas about a *demoiselle d'honneur* of Marie Antoinette—I don't remember her name or her history, but she became the Comtesse de Charny. Now I shall think of you by that name—the Comtesse de Charny. Tell me, Comtesse, does it not shock your sense, our modern worship of that excellent, useful, comfortable fellow, the Golden Calf?"

"I don't know anything at all about him—who is he?" I said.

"Oh, he is a Jew, or a Turk, or an African millionaire—any one with a hundred thousand a year."

I thought of Augustus—"calf" seemed just the word for him.

I laughed.

"We have a beautiful example of one here to-night," he continued; "indeed you were dancing with him—the bear who mauled Lady Tilchester. How did you get to know such a person?"

My heart gave a bound.

"I am engaged to Mr. Gurrage," I said, in a half voice, but raising my head.

Oh, the surprise and—and *disgust* in his eyes! Then, I don't know what he saw in my face, I tried only to look calm and indifferent, but the contempt went out of his manner, his eyes softened, and he put out his hand and touched my fingers very gently.

"Oh, you poor little white Comtesse!" he said.

I ought to have been furious. Pity, as a rule, angers me so that it would render me capable of being torn to pieces by lions without flinching; but I am ashamed—oh! so ashamed—to say that tears sprang up into my eyes—tears! Mercifully, grandmamma will never know.

"Come," I said, and we rose and walked down the corridor. There we met Augustus, with a face like thunder. He had been looking everywhere for me, he said. It appeared we had been sitting out for two dances.

"You promised me this one more turn," said the tall man, quite unabashed; "they are playing a charming valse."

"She is engaged to me," growled Augustus.

"No, I am not," I said, smiling into his angry face; "I am quite my own mistress as regards whom I dance with. I will come back when it is finished and you shall have the next one," and I walked off with my friend of the knife.

Whether my *fiancé* stood there and swore or not I do not know; I did not look back. We did not speak a word until the dance was finished, my partner and I. Then he said:

"Thank you, little lady. We have, at all events, snatched some few good moments out of this evening. Now, I suppose, we must return to your—bear."

Augustus was standing by the buffet drinking champagne when we caught sight of him. We stepped for a moment out of his view behind some palms.

"Good-bye, Comtesse."

"Good-bye," I said. "Will you tell me your name? I did not hear it——"

"My name! Oh, my name is Antony Thornhirst—why do you start?"

"I—did not start—good-bye——"

"No, you shall not go until you tell me why you started? And your name, too; I do not know it either!"

"Ambrosine de Calincourt Athelstan."

He knitted his level eyebrows as if trying to recall something, and absently began to pull the knife out of his pocket. Augustus was coming towards us.

"Yes," I said, "but it is too late. Good-bye."

The look of indifference, the rather mocking smile, the *sans souci,* which are the chief characteristics of his face, altered. I left him puzzled—moved.

Grandmamma was awake, propped up in bed, her hair still powdered and her lace night-cap on, when the Marquis and I got home. I leaned over the rail and told her all about the ball. The Marquis sat in the arm-chair by the fire.

"And where is your promised bouquet, my child?" she asked.

I faltered.

"Well, you see, grandmamma, I put it in a chair after the beginning, and Mrs. Gurrage sat on it, so I thought perhaps, as it was all mashed, I could leave it behind."

Grandmamma laughed; she was pleased, I could see, that the evening had gone off without a fiasco!

"I met Sir Antony Thornhirst," I said.

The blue mark appeared vividly and suddenly round grandmamma's mouth—she shut her eyes for a moment. I rushed to her.

"Oh, dear grandmamma," I said, "what can I do?"

She drank something out of a glass beside her, and then said, in rather a weak voice:

"You were saying you met your kinsman. And what was he like, Ambrosine?"

"Well, he was tall and very straight, and had small ears and—er—a fairish mustache that was brushed up a little away from his lips, and—and cat's eyes, and—brown, crimpy hair, getting a little gray."

"Yes, yes; but I mean, what sort of a man?"

"Oh! a gentleman."

"But of course."

"Well, he laughed at everything and called me an eighteenth-century comtesse."

"Did he know who you were?"

"No, not till the end, and then I do not think he realized that I was a connection of his."

"It does not matter," said grandmamma, low to herself, "as it is too late."

"Yes, I told him it was too late."

Grandmamma's voice sharpened.

"You told him! What do you mean?" and she leaned forward a little.

"I don't quite know what I did mean—those words just slipped out."

She lay back on her pillows—poor grandmamma—as if she was exhausted.

"Child," she said, very low, "yes—never forget we have given our word; whatever happens, any change is too late."

A look of anguish came over her face. Oh, how it hurt me to see her suffering!

"Dear grandmamma," I said, "do not think I mind. I have done and will do all you wish, and—and—as the Marquis said—it will not matter in a year."

The Marquis, I believe, had been dozing, but at the sound of his name he looked up and spoke.

"Chère amie, you can indeed be proud of *la belle débutante* to-night; she was by far the most beautiful at the ball—*sans exception!* Even the adorable Lady Tilchester had not her grand air. *Les demoiselles anglaises! Ce sont des fagotages inouïs pour la plus part,* with their movements of the wooden horse and their skins of the goddess! As for *le fiancé, il était assez retenu, il avait pourtant l'air maussade, mais il se consolait avec du champagne—il fera un très brave mari."*

CHAPTER V

The next day Augustus went to London by the early train. I fortunately saw the dog-cart coming, and rushed to tell Hephzibah to say I was not up if he stopped, which of course he did on his way to the station. He left a message for me. He would be back at half-past four, and would come in to tea. The Marquis and I were to dine there in the evening, so I am sure that would be time enough to have seen him. Grandmamma said it was no doubt the engagement-ring he had gone to London to buy, and that I *really must* receive it with a good grace.

At about four o'clock, while I was reading aloud the oration of Bossuet on the funeral of Madame d'Orléans, the tuff-tuff-tuff of a motor-car was heard, and it drew up at our gate and out got Sir Antony Thornhirst and Lady Tilchester.

Although I could see them with the corner of my eye, and grandmamma could too, I should not have dared to have stopped my reading, and was actually in the middle of a sentence when Hephzibah announced them. I did not forget to make my *révérence* this time, and grandmamma half rose from her chair. Lady Tilchester has the most lovely manners. In a few minutes we all felt perfectly happy together, and she had told us how Sir Antony was so anxious to make grandmamma's acquaintance, having discovered by chance that he was a connection of hers, that she—Lady Tilchester—had slipped away from her guests and brought him over in her new motor, and she trusted grandmamma would forgive her unan-

nounced descent upon us. She also said how she wished she had heard before that we were in this neighborhood, that she might have months ago made our acquaintance, and could perhaps have been useful to us.

I shall always love her, her sweet voice and the beautiful diffidence of her manner to grandmamma, as though she were receiving a great honor by grandmamma's reception of her. So different to Mrs. Gurrage's patronizing vulgarity! I could see grandmamma was delighted with her.

Sir Antony talked to me. He asked me if I was tired, or something banal like that; his voice was *distraite*. I answered him gayly, and then we changed seats, and he had a conversation with grandmamma. I do not know what they spoke about, as Lady Tilchester and I went to the other end of the room, but his manner looked so gallant, and I knew by grandmamma's face that she was saying the witty, sententious things that she does to the Marquis. A faint pink flush came into her cheeks which made her look such a very beautiful old lady.

Lady Tilchester talked to me about the garden and the ball the night before, and at last asked me when I was going to be married.

It seemed to bring me back with a rush to earth from some enchanted world which contained no Augustus.

"I—don't know," I faltered, and then, ashamed of my silly voice, said, firmly, "Grandmamma has not arranged the date yet——"

"I hope you will be very happy," said Lady Tilchester, and she would not look at me, which was kind of her.

"Thank you," I said. "Grandmamma is no longer young, and she will feel relieved to know I have a home of my own."

"It is delightful to think we shall have you for a neigh-

bor. Harley is only fifteen miles from here. I wonder if Mrs. Athelstan would let you come and stay a few days with me?"

"Oh! I should *love* to," I said.

However, grandmamma, when the subject was broached to her presently, firmly declined.

"A month ago I should have accepted with much pleasure," she said, "but circumstances and my health do not now permit me to part even for a short time with Ambrosine."

She looked at Lady Tilchester and Lady Tilchester looked back at her, and although nothing more was said about the matter, I am sure they understood each other.

Sir Antony came and sat by me in the window-sill. I was wearing my chatelaine and he noticed it.

"I am a blind idiot!" he exclaimed. "Of course you are the kind lady who lent me the knife, which I broke, and then stole in a brutal way."

"I saw you did not recognize me the other night."

"I could only see out of one eye, you know, that day in the lane—that must be my excuse."

I said nothing.

"I am not going to give back the knife."

"Then it is real stealing—and it spoils my chatelaine," I said, holding up the empty chain.

"I will give you another in its place, but I must keep this one."

"That is silly—why?"

"It is very agreeable to do silly things sometimes—for instance, I should like——"

What he would have liked I never knew, for at that moment we both caught sight of Augustus getting out of his station brougham at our gate.

"Here comes your bear," said Sir Antony, but he did

not attempt to stir from his seat. We could see Augustus walk up the path and turn the handle of the front door without ringing. In this impertinence I am glad to say he was checked, as Hephzibah had fortunately let the bolt slip after showing in Lady Tilchester. He rang an angry peal. Grandmamma frowned.

When Augustus finally got into the room his face was purple. He had hardly self-control enough to greet Lady Tilchester with his usual obsequiousness. She talked charmingly to him for a few moments, and then got up to go.

Meanwhile Sir Antony had been conversing with me quite as if no *fiancé* had entered the room.

"You know we are cousins," he said.

"Very distant ones."

"Why on earth did you not let me know when first you came to this place?"

"Grandmamma has never told me why she left you uninformed of our arrival," I laughed. "How could we have known it would interest you?"

"But you—don't you ever do anything of your own accord?"

"I would like to sometimes."

"It is monstrous to have kept you shut up here and then to——"

Augustus crossed the room.

"Ambrosine," he interrupted, rudely, "I shall come and fetch you this evening for dinner, as you are too busy now to speak to me."

"Very well," I said.

Sir Antony rose, and we made a general good-bye.

There was something disturbed in his face—as if he had not said what he meant to. A sickening anger and disgust with fate made my hand cold. Oh!—if— Alas!

CHAPTER VI

To-morrow is my wedding-day—the 10th of June. There is my dress spread over the sofa, looking like a ghost in the dim light—I have only one candle on the dressing-table. It is pouring rain and there are rumbles of thunder in the distance. Well, let it pour and hail and rage, and do what it pleases—I don't care! Just now a flash came nearer and seemed to catch the huge diamonds in my engagement-ring, which hangs loose on my finger now. I flung it into the little china tray, where strings of pearls and a fender tiara are already reposing ready for to-morrow. I shall blaze with jewels, and Augustus will be able to tell the guests how much they all cost.

This month of my *fiançailles* has been nothing agreeable to recall. Indeed, I should not have been able to go through with it only the blue mark has so often appeared round grandmamma's mouth, especially when Augustus and I have had trifling differences of opinion.

Long years ago, one summer we spent at Versailles when I was a child, I remember an incident.

I was sitting reading aloud to grandmamma in the garden when from the trees above there fell upon my neck, which was bare, a fat, hairy caterpillar. I recollect I gave a gurgling, nasty scream, and dropped the book.

Grandmamma was very angry. She explained to me that such noises were extremely vulgar, and that if my flesh was so little under control that this should turn me sick, the sooner I got over such fancies the better.

She made me pick the creature up and let it crawl over

my arm. At first I nearly felt mad with horror, but gradually custom deadened the sensation, and although it remained disagreeable, I could contemplate it without emotion.

This memory has often proved useful to me during this last month. To-day, even, I was able to sit upon the sofa and allow Augustus to kiss me for quite ten minutes, without having to rush up and take sal-volatile, as I had to in the beginning.

I have been through various trying ordeals. The tenants have presented us with silver trays and other things, and we have listened to speeches, and bowed sweetly, and numbers of hitherto distant acquaintances have showered presents upon us. My future mother-in-law has loaded me with advice, chiefly of a purely domestic kind, most of it a guide as to how I had better please Augustus.

It appears he likes thick toast in preference to thin, and thick soups; also that a habit he has of taking Welsh rarebit and stout for a late supper when he sits up alone is not good for his digestion and is to be discouraged. She hopes I will see that he wears his second thinnest Jäger vests in Paris, not *the* thinnest—which ought to be kept for August warmth—as once before when there he caught a bad catarrh of the chest through this imprudence.

Lady Tilchester is coming down from London in a special train on purpose to grace our bridal ceremony. She has sent me the prettiest brooch and such a nice letter.

I hope she will be a consolation in the future. For me life must be a thing of waking in the morning, and eating and drinking, and taking exercise, and going to bed again, and deadening all emotions, or else I feel sure I shall get a dreadful disease I once read about in an American

paper Hephzibah takes in. It is called "spontaneous combustion," and it said in the paper that a man caught it from having got into a compressed state of heat and rage for weeks, and it made him burst up at last into flames like an exploding shell.

Well, at all events, I have kept my word, and grandmamma is content with me.

Miss Hoad—I shall have to call her Amelia now—is enchanted with the whole entertainment. She is to be the only bridesmaid, and has chosen the dress herself. It is coffee lace with a mustard-yellow sash. It will match her complexion. And Augustus is presenting her with a huge bouquet, no doubt of the cauliflower shape, like my famous one, besides a diamond-and-ruby watch.

I wonder if Sir Antony will be at the wedding—he was asked.

The Marquis de Rochermont will give me away—grandmamma is too feeble now to stand. The ceremony is to be in the village church here, and the choir, composed of village youths unacquainted with a note of music, is to meet us at the lich-gate and precede us up the aisle, singing an encouraging wedding-hymn, while school-children spread forced white roses, provided by the Tilchester rose-growers.

Augustus explained that patronizing local resources like this will all come in useful when he stands for Parliament later on.

Grandmamma stipulated that there should be no wedding feast, her health and our small house being sufficient excuse. It is a great disappointment to Mrs. Gurrage, I am sure, but we go away to Paris as soon as I can change my dress after the church ceremony.

Think of it! This time to-morrow my name will be Gurrage! And Augustus will have the right to— Mer-

ciful God! stop my heart from beating in this sickening fashion, and let me remember the motto of my race—*"Sans bruit."*

Oh, grandmamma, if I could go on your journey with you! The first jump out into the dark might be fearful, but afterwards it would be quiet and still, and there would be no caterpillars!

That was a beautiful flash of lightning! The storm is coming nearer. Sparks flew from my diamond fender on the dressing-table. Well—well—I—I wish I had seen Sir Antony again. Just now he sent me a present. It is a knife for my chatelaine, the hilt studded with diamonds, and there is a note which says that there is still time to cut the Gordian knot.

What does it mean? I feel cold, as if I could not understand things to-night.

The Marquis gave me some *conseils de mariage* this afternoon.

"Remain placid," he said, *"fermez les yeux et pensez à autrui—après vous aurez les agréments."*

Grandmamma has not even kissed me. Her eyes resemble a hawk's still, but have the look of a tortured tiger as well sometimes. She has grown terribly feeble, and has twice had fainting-fits like the one that changed my destiny. I believe she is remaining alive simply by strength of will and that she will die when all is over.

She has given me the greatest treasure of her life, the miniature of Ambrosine Eustasie. I have it here by my side for my very own.

Yes, Ambrosine Eustasie, for me, to-morrow, there is also the guillotine; and perhaps I, too, could walk up the steps smiling if I were allowed a rose to keep off the smell of the common people; Augustus's mother uses patchouli.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

No one can possibly imagine the unpleasantness of a honeymoon until they have tried it. It is no wonder one is told nothing at all about it. Even to keep my word and obey grandmamma I could never have undertaken it if I had had an idea what it would be like. Really, girls' dreams are the silliest things in the world. I can't help staring at all the married people I see about. "You—poor wretches!—have gone through this," I say to myself; and then I wonder and wonder that they can smile and look gay. I long to ask them when the calmness and indifference set in; how long I shall have to wait before I can really profit by grandmamma's lesson of the caterpillar. It was useful for the *fiançailles,* but it has not comforted me much since my wedding.

In old-fashioned books, when the heroine comes to anything exciting, or when the situation is too difficult for the author to describe, there is always a row of stars. It seems to mean a jump, a break to be filled up as each person pleases. I feel I must leave this part of my life marked with this row of stars.

It is two weeks now since I wrote my name Ambrosine de Calincourt Athelstan for the last time, two weeks since I walked down the rose-strewn guillotine steps on Augustus's arm, two weeks since he— Ah, no! I will never look back at that. Let these hideous two weeks sink into the abyss of oblivion!

It hardly seems possible that in fifteen days one could so completely alter one's views and notions of life. I cannot look at anything with the same eyes. It is all

very well for people to talk philosophy, but it is difficult to be philosophical when one's every sense is being continually *froissé*. I feel sometimes that I could commit murder, and I do not know when I shall be able to take the Marquis's advice to remain placid and shut my eyes and try to get what good out of life I can.

Augustus as a husband is extremely unpleasant. I hate the way his hair is brushed—there always seems to be a lock sticking up in the back; I hate the way he ties his ties; I hate everything he says and does. I keep saying to myself when I hear him coming, "remember the caterpillar, caterpillar, caterpillar." And once in the beginning, when I was screwing up my eyes not to see, he got quite close before I knew and he heard me saying it aloud.

He bounced away, thinking I meant there was one crawling on him, and then he got quite cross.

"There are no caterpillars here, Ambrosine. How silly you are!" he said.

He revels in being at once recognized as a bridegroom. He has dreadfully familiar ways and catches hold of my arm in public, making us both perfectly ridiculous. He has insisted upon buying me numbers of gorgeous garments for my outer covering, but when I ventured to order some very fine other things he grumbled at the cost.

"I don't mind your getting clothes that will show the money I've put into them," he explained, "but I'm bothered if I'll encourage useless extravagance in this way."

At the play he never understands more than a few words, but is always asking me to explain what it means when there is anything interesting, so I miss most of it myself from having to talk, and some of the French plays are really very funny, I find, and have opened my eyes a great deal, and I—even I—could laugh if I were left in peace to listen a little.

Augustus is furiously angry, too, when the Frenchmen look at me. I never thought I could even notice the gaze of strangers, but I am ashamed to say that last night it quite pleased me.

We were dining at Paillards, and two really nice-looking Frenchmen had the next table. They looked at me, and Augustus glared at them and fussed the waiters more than usual, and wanted to hurry me as much as possible to get away; so I asked for other dishes and peaches and nectarines and things out of season. At last, when I had dawdled quite an extra half-hour, it came to an end, and the usual sums on the margin of the bill began—Augustus adds up every item to see no sou has been overcharged. At this point I looked up and caught one of the Frenchmen's eye. Of course I glanced away at once, but there was such a gleam of fun in his that I nearly smiled. Then suddenly the recollection came upon me that this creature, this thing sitting opposite me, belonged to me. I have his name, he is my husband. I must not laugh with others at his odious ways. After that I was glad to creep away.

I am worried about grandmamma. She has not written; there only came a small note from the Marquis. I am sure she must be very ill, if not already dead. I cannot grieve; I almost feel as if I wished it so. Augustus as a grandson-in-law would sting her fine senses unbearably. He blusters continually, and his airs of proprietorship *envers moi* would irritate her; besides, she would always have the idea that she is cheating me by remaining alive, that, after all, my marriage was not a necessity if she is still there to keep me. Oh, dear grandmamma! if I could save you a moment's sorrow you know I would. When I said good-bye to her she held me close and kissed me. "Ambrosine," she said, "I shall have

started upon my journey before you come back; you must not grieve or be sad. My last advice to you, my child, is to remember life is full of compensations, as you will find. Try to see the bright and gay side of things, and, above all, do not be dramatic."

She was always cheerful, grandmamma, but if I could just see her again to tell her I will, indeed I will, try to follow her advice! Hush! here is Augustus; I hear his clumsy footsteps. He has a telegram.

Alas! alas! My fears are true—grandmamma died this morning. Oh! I cannot write, the tears make everything a mist.

It is late July and I am at Ledstone as its nominal mistress—I say nominal, for Augustus's mother reigns, as she always did.

The sorrow of grandmamma's death, the feeling that nothing can matter in the world now, has kept me from caring or asserting myself in any way. I feel numb. I seem to be a person listening from some gallery when they all speak around me, and that the Ambrosine who answers placidly is an automaton who moves by clock-work.

Shall I ever wake again? I sit night after night in my mother-in-law's "budwar," the crimson-satin chairs staring at me, the wedding-cake ornament with its silver leaves glittering in the electric light; I sit there listening vaguely to her admonitions and endless prattle of Augustus's perfections. I have now heard every incident of his childhood: what ailments he had, what medicines suited him best, when he cut all those superfluous teeth of his.

One little trait appears to have been considered a sign of great astuteness and infantine perception. His fond parents—the late Mr. Gurrage was alive then—gave him a new threepenny bit each week to give to a barrel-organ

man who played before the house at Bournemouth. Augustus at the age of two invariably changed it on the stairs with the butler for two pennies and two halfpennies, keeping one penny halfpenny for himself.

"Me dear"—my mother-in-law always completes this story with this sentence—"Mr. Gurrage said to me, 'Mark my word, Mary Jane, the boy will get on!' "

In the class of my *belle famille,* mourning is fortunately a matter of such importance that the wearing of crêpe for grandmamma has been allowed to be sufficient reason for abandoning the wedding rejoicings.

Dear grandmamma! it would please you to know your death had done me even this service. I am encouraged to grieve, especially in public. Mrs. Gurrage herself put on black, and her face beamed all over with enjoyable tears the first Sunday we rustled into the family pew stiff with crêpe and hangings of woe. They gave grandmamma what Miss Hoad—I mean Amelia—called a "proper funeral."

And so all is done—even the Marquis has gone back to France, and only Roy is left.

There is something in his brown eyes of sympathy which I cannot bear; the lump keeps coming in my throat. Kind dog, you are my friend.

Next week Lady Tilchester will have returned to Harley, and soon Augustus and I are to go and pay a three days' visit there.

Once what joy this thought would have caused me—I was going to say when I was young!—I shall be twenty next October, but I feel as if I must be at least fifty years old.

Augustus is not a gay companion. He has a sulky temper; he is often offended with me for no reason, and then a day or so afterwards will be horribly affectionate,

and give me a present to make up for it. I can never get accustomed to his calling me Ambrosine—it always jars, as if one suddenly heard a shopman taking this liberty. It is equally unpleasant as "little woman" or "dearie," both of which besprinkle all his sentences. He has not a mind that makes it possible to have any conversation with him. He told me to-day that I was the stupidest cold statue of a woman he had ever met, and then he shook me until I felt giddy, and kissed me until I could not see. After a scene of this kind I feel too limp to move. I creep out into the garden and hide with Roy in a clump of laurel bushes, where there is a neglected sun-dial that was once the centre of the old garden, and left there when the new shrubbery was planted; there is about six feet bare space around it, and no one ever comes there, so I am safe.

Sometimes from my hiding-place I hear Augustus calling me, but I never answer, and yesterday I caught sight of him through the bushes, biting his nails with annoyance; he could not think where I had disappeared to. It comforted me to sit there and make faces at him like a gutter-child.

I have never had the courage to go back to the cottage. It is just as it was, with all grandmamma's dear old things in it, waiting for me to decide where I will have them put. Hephzibah has married her grocer's man, and lives there as caretaker.

I suppose some day I shall have to go down and settle things, but I feel as if it would be desecration to bring the Sèvres and miniatures and the Louis XV *bergère* here to hobnob with the new productions from Tottenham Court Road.

Augustus is having some rooms arranged for me, so that I, too, shall have a "budwar" for myself. He has not

consulted my taste; it is all to be a surprise. And an army of workmen are still in the house, and I have caught glimpses of brilliant new gilt chairs and terra-cotta and buffish brocade (I loathe those colors) being carried up.

"Then I'll be able to have you more to myself in the evening," said Augustus. "The drawing-rooms are too big and the mater's budwar is too small, and you hate my den, so I hope this will please you."

I said "Thank you," without enthusiasm. I would prefer the company of my mother-in-law or Amelia to being more alone with Augustus. The crimson-satin chairs are so uncomfortable that now he leaves us almost directly after dinner to lounge in his "den," and I have to go there and say good-night to him. The place smells of stale smoke, some particularly strong, common tobacco he will have in a pipe. He gets into a soiled, old, blue smoking-coat, and sits there reading the comic papers, huddled in a deep arm-chair, a whiskey-and-soda mixed ready by his side. He is generally half-asleep when I get there. I do not stay five minutes if I can help it; it is not agreeable, the smell of whiskey.

There are so few books in the house. The first instalment of my handsome "allowance" will soon be paid me, and then I will have books of my own. I shall feel like a servant receiving the first month's wages in a new place —a miserable beginner of a servant who has never been "out" before. I feel I have earned them, though—earned them with hard work.

Just this last month numbers of people have been to call on me. They left only cards at first, because of my "sad loss," but we often are at home now when they come.

My mother-in-law's visiting-list is a large one, and comprises the whole of the "villa" people from Tilchester as well as the county families. With the former she is de-

liciously patronizingly friendly; they are all "me dears," and they talk about their servants and ailments and babies, mixed with the doings of Lady Tilchester—they always speak of her as the "Marchioness of Tilchester." They are at home when we return the visits sometimes, too, and this kind of thing happens: our gorgeous prune-and-scarlet footman condescendingly walks up their paths and thumps loudly at their well-cleaned brass knocker, and presses their electric bell. A jaunty lump of a parlor-maid in a fluster at the sight of so much grandeur says "At home" (some of them have "days"), and we are ushered into a narrow hall and so to a drawing-room. They seem always to be papered with buff-and-mustard papers and to have "pongee" sofa-cushions with frills. There is often tennis going on on the neat lawn beyond, and we see visions of large, pink-faced girls and callow youths taking exercise. The hostess gushes at us: "Dear Mrs. Gurrage, so good of you to come—and this is Mrs. Gussie?" (Yes, I am called Mrs. Gussie. Oh! grandmamma, do you hear?) We sit down.

I have no intention of freezing people, but they are hideously ill at ease with me, and say all kinds of foolishnesses from sheer nervousness.

The worst happened last week, when one particularly motherly, blooming solicitor's wife, after recounting to us in full detail the arrival of her first grandchild, hoped Mrs. Gurrage would soon be in her happy position!

Merciful Providence, I pray—that—never!

The county people are not so often at home, but when they are it is hardly more interesting. There do not seem to be many attractive people among them. They are stiff, and it is my mother-in-law who is sometimes ill at ease, though she gushes and blusters as usual. The conversation here is of societies, the Girls' Friendly Society, the

Cottage Hospital, the movements of the Church, the continuance of the war; and now and then the hostess warms up, if there is a question of a subscription, to her own pet hobby. Their houses are for the most part tasteless, too; they seem to live in a respectable *borné* world of daily duties and sleep. Of the three really big houses within driving distance, one is shut up, one is inhabited for a month or two in the autumn, and the third is let to a successful oil merchant to whom Augustus and my mother-in-law have a great objection, but I can see no difference between oil and carpets. I have seen the man, and he is a weazly looking little rat who drives good horses.

I wonder what has become of my kinsman, Antony Thornhirst. He came with Lady Tilchester to the wedding. I saw his strange eyes looking at me as I walked down the aisle on Augustus's arm. His face was the only one I realized in the crowd. We did not speak; indeed, he never was near me afterwards until I got into the carriage. I wonder if he will be at Harley—I wonder!

Augustus wishes me to be "very smart" for this visit; he tells me I am to take all my best clothes and "cut the others out." It really grieves him that my garments should be black. He suggested to his mother that she had better lend me some of the "family jewels" to augment my own large store, but fortunately Mrs. Gurrage is of a tenacious disposition and likes to keep her own belongings to herself, so I shall be spared the experience of the park-paling tiara sitting upon my brow. Such things being unsuitable to be worn at dinner I fear would have little influence upon Augustus; I am trembling even now at what I may be forced to glitter in.

We are to drive over to Harley late in the afternoon.

CHAPTER II

In spite of Augustus—in spite of everything—I suddenly feel as if I had become alive again here at Harley!

The whole place pleases me. It is an old Georgian house, with long wings stretching right and left, and from a large salon in the centre the other reception-rooms open.

Lady Tilchester is so kind, and makes one feel perfectly at home. A number of people were assembled upon the lawn and in the great tent playing bridge when we arrived, and as no one seemed to introduce any one it has taken me two whole days to find out people's names. Some of them, indeed, I have not grasped yet! It does seem a strange custom. Either it is because every one in this set is supposed to be acquainted with the other, and strangers are things that do not count, or that meeting under one roof constitutes an introduction. I have not yet found out which it is.

Anyway, it makes things dull at first. Augustus found it "deuced unpleasant," he told me, as, instead of remaining quiet until he knew his ground, he proceeded to commit a series of *bêtises*.

The first afternoon I subsided into a low chair, and a gruff-looking man handed me some tea, and patted and talked to a bob-tailed sheep-dog that was near.

I don't know if he expected me to answer for the dog, and so make a conversation. He was disappointed, however, if so, as I remained silent. Presently I discovered he was our host.

Lady Tilchester was busy being gushed at by Augustus.

A little woman with light hair came and sat down at the other side of me. She looks like a young, fluffy chicken, and has a lisp and an infantile voice, and wears numbers of trinkets, and her name, "Babykins," spelled in a brooch of diamonds. I should not like to be called "Babykins," and I wonder why one should want strangers to read one's name printed upon one's chest.

Everything of hers is marked with that. Chain bracelets with "Babykins" in sapphires and diamonds. On her handkerchief, which she plays with, "Babykins" again stares at you. Even the corner of her chemise which shows through her transparent blouse, has "Babykins" embroidered on it. It is no wonder even the young men never call her anything else.

You have the first impression that you are talking to a child, but afterwards you are surprised to find what a lot of grown-up, scandalous things she has said.

She was very agreeable to me, and gave me to understand she was so interested to make my acquaintance, as Lady Tilchester had told her so much about me.

"You come from Yorkshire, don't you?" she said; "and your husband has that wonderful breed of black pigs, hasn't he?"

"No," I said, "we live only sixteen miles off."

"Oh, of course! How stupid of me! You are quite another person, I see," and she laughed. "But the pig farmers are coming, and I am so anxious to meet them, as I have a perfect mania for piglets myself. I want to start a new sort, and I hoped you could tell me about them."

"I am so sorry," I said. "I wish I could help you, but I do not believe—except casually in the village—that I have ever seen a pig; they must be delightful companions."

"Yes, indeed! I have large families of the fat white ones, and really the babies are most engaging, and the very

image of my step-children. I always tell my husband it seems like eating Alice or Laura when he insists upon having suckling-pig for luncheon. I suppose one would not mind eating one's step-children, though—would one? What do you think?"

Her great, blue eyes looked at me pathetically.

I tried to consider seriously the problem of the consumption of possible step-children; it was too difficult for me.

"I quite hoped to make it pay," she continued—"keeping prize pigs, I mean; we are so frightfully poor. But I am away so much I fear it does not do very well. You play bridge, of course?"

This did not seem to have much to do with the pigs.

"No, I do not play."

"You don't play bridge? How on earth do you get through the day?"

"I really do not know."

"Oh, you must learn at once. I can give you the address of a woman in London who goes out for five pounds an afternoon and who would teach you in three or four lessons. It does seem funny, your not playing."

I said "Yes."

She did not appear to want many answers from me after this, but prattled on about people and the world in general, and before half an hour was over I was left with the impression that society is chiefly composed of people living upon an agreeable and amusing ground somewhere at the borderland of the divorce court.

"So tiresome of the husbands!" she concluded. "Before the war they used to be the most docile creatures; as long as they got a percentage, and the wives did not worry at their own little affairs, all went smoothly. Now, since going out there and fighting, they had come back giving

themselves great airs, and talking about wounded honor, and ridiculous things of that sort one reads of in early Victorian books. One does not know where it will end."

She yawned a little after this, and Lord Tilchester shuffled up and sat down in the corner of the sofa near her. He has the manner of an awkward school-boy.

"You are taking away every one's character, as usual, I suppose, Babykins," he chuckled. "What will Mrs. Gurrage think of it all, I wonder?"

Lady Tilchester interrupted further conversation by carrying me off to see the garden. She is the most fascinating personality I have yet met. There is something like the sun's rays about her—you feel warmed and comforted when she is near. She looks so great and noble, and above all common things, one cannot help wondering why she married Lord Tilchester, who is quite ordinary. When she talks, every one listens. Her voice is like golden bells, and she never says stupid things that mean nothing. We had half an hour in the glorious garden, and she made me feel that life was a fair thing, and that even I should find bits to smile over. How great to have a nature like this, that one's very presence does good to other human beings!

"There are a lot of tiresome people here, I am afraid," she said, at last; "but I wanted you to come to the first party we had after our return, so you must try and not be bored. You shall sit next Mr. Budge to-night; he will be obliged to take in Lady Lambourne, but I will put you on the other side. He will amuse you; he is the cleverest man I know."

"Mr. Budge is a politician, is he not?" I asked. "I think I have heard his name."

"That is delightful," she laughed. "Poor Mr. Budge! He—and, indeed, many of us in England—fancies there

is no other name to be heard. He has a fault, though. He writes sentimental poetry which is complete rubbish, and he prides himself upon it far more than upon his splendid powers of oratory or wonderful organizati capacities."

"What a strange side for a great man to have!" I said. "Sentimental poetry—it seems so childish, does it not?"

"We all have our weaknesses, I suppose," and she smiled. "We should be very dull if we left nothing for our friends to criticise."

"Si nous n'avions point de défauts nous ne prendrions pas tant de plaisir à en remarquer dans les autres!" I quoted.

After a while we went back to the house.

Augustus and I got down at half-past eight for dinner, as grandmamma had always told me that punctuality is a part of politeness, but only one or two men were standing by the huge wood-fire that burns all the time in the open fireplace in the salon where we assembled.

We did not know any of their names, and I suppose they did not know ours. We stared at one another, and they went on talking again, all about the war. Augustus joined in. He is dreadfully uneasy in case the rest of the Tilchester Yeomanry may volunteer at last to go out, and was anxious to hear their views of the possibility. I sat down upon a fat-pillowed sofa, one of those nice kind that puff out again slowly when you get up, and make you feel at rest any way you sit.

A short man with a funny face came and sat beside me.

"What a wonderful lady, to be so punctual!" he said. "You evidently don't know the house. We shall be lucky if we get dinner at nine o'clock."

"Why did you come down, then," I asked, "since you are acquainted with the ways?"

"On the off chance, and because a bad habit of youth sticks to me, and I can't help being on time."

"I am finding it absurd to have acquired habits in youth; they are all being upset," I said.

He had such a cheery face, in spite of being so ugly, it seemed quite easy to talk to him. We chatted lightly until some one called out: "Billy, do ring and ask if we can have a biscuit and a glass of sherry, to keep us up until we get dinner."

At that moment—it was nearly nine—more people strolled in, two women with their husbands, and several odd pairs—the last among the single people quite the loveliest creature I have ever seen. She does not know how to walk, and her lips were almost magenta with some stuff on them, but her eyes flashed round at every one, and there seemed to be a flutter among the men by the fireplace.

Augustus dropped his jaw with admiration. She had on a bright purple dress and numbers of jewels. I feel sure he was saying to himself that she was a "stunner." She did not look at all vulgar, however, only wicked and attractive and delightful.

"Darling Letitia," she pleaded, to a stiff-looking old woman sitting bolt-upright under a lamp, "don't glare at me so. I am not the last to-night; there are still Babykins and Margaret and several others to come."

"Oh, Lord, how hungry I am!" announced Mr. Budge, in a loud voice. I recognized him now from his picture being so often in the papers.

Then, from a door at the other end, in tripped Babykins, and close behind her Lord Tilchester, and, last of all, when the clock had struck nine-fifteen, and even the funny-faced man next me had exhausted all his conversation, the door at the north end of the salon opened, and serenely, like a lovely ship, our beautiful hostess sailed towards us.

"So sorry to be a little late," she said, calmly. "Tilchester, as you have, of course, told every one whom they are to take in, we may as well start."

Lord Tilchester had been sitting in the window-seat with Babykins, and had completely forgotten this duty, I suppose. He got up guiltily and fumbled for a paper in his pocket.

"Oh, don't let us wait for that," said Mr. Budge, gruffly. "Come, Lady Tilchester, I shall take you and lead the way," and he gave her his arm.

She laughed and took it.

"Very well," she said.

Every one scrambled for the people they wanted or knew best; and so it happened that I found myself standing staring at a pale young man with weak blue eyes and a wonderfully well-tied tie, the last of the company.

He held out his arm nervously, and we finally got to the dining-room and found two seats.

It was not until dinner was almost over that I found out he was the Duke of Myrlshire, and ought to have taken in Lady Tilchester.

Augustus had placed himself next the purple lady, and his face grew a gray mauve with excitement at her gracious glances.

My ducal partner was unattractive. He had a squeaky voice and a nervous manner, but said some *entreprenant* things in a way which made me understand he is accustomed to be listened to with patience, not to say pleasure.

He told me he was grateful to Mr. Budge for his move, as he had been admiring me since the moment we arrived, and had determined, directly the *mêlée* began, to secure me if possible.

"Er—you don't look like an Englishwoman," he said,

"and it is a nice change. My eye is wearied with them; their outlines are all exactly alike."

He further informed me that Paris was the only place to live in, and that the English as a nation were crude in their vices.

"They make such a noise about everything here," he added. "One cannot do a thing that it is not put the wrong way up in the halfpenny papers."

"The penalty of greatness," I said, laughing. "They don't worry at all, for instance, about what I am doing."

"Then they show extremely bad taste," he said, with a look of frank admiration.

Before the women swept in a body from the room, I understood that his object in life would henceforth be to make me sensible of his great worth and charm. All these masterful, forward sentiments sounded so comic, expressing themselves in his squeaky voice, I could not help smiling. He became radiant. He did not guess in the least what amused me.

Although the salon is immense, the ten or twelve women all crowded around the fireplace. It was a damp, chilly evening.

They all seemed to know one another very well, and called each other by their Christian names, so until Babykins again gave me some information I did not realize who people were.

The purple lady is Lady Grenellen; her husband is at the war. She is most attractive. She sat on a big sofa and smoked cigarettes rapidly in a little amber holder. She must have got through at least three or four of them before the men came in.

Lady Tilchester and two other women were deep in South-African news, the rest talked about books and their

clothes, but Babykins and Letitia exchanged views upon the scandal of the time.

Lady Tilchester came and joined us; it seemed like a breath of fresh sunlight illuminating the scene.

"You appear all to be talking scandal," she said.

Imperceptibly the conversation changed, and we were discussing the war news when the double doors of the dining-room opened.

Augustus looked very flushed in the face and unattractive as he came towards us, but Lady Grenellen moved her skirts and made room for him on her sofa. She smiled at him divinely, and was perfectly lovely to him—as friendly and caressing as if he were an equal. It perfectly astonished me. I could not talk and joke familiarly like that with Augustus any more than if he were one of the footmen. And she is a viscountess, and must at least know what a gentleman is.

Half the party moved off to play bridge in one of the drawing-rooms; the rest arranged themselves comfortably, two and two. Lady Tilchester and Mr. Budge wandered into the music-room, and I, who had not stirred, found myself almost alone by the fireplace with the Duke.

He proceeded to say a number of things to me that astonished me greatly. I should not have understood them all had I not been to those plays in Paris.

I suppose he was beginning to make love to me—if this is what is called making love. His personality is not attractive, so it did not touch me at all, and I am only able to look upon men now through eyes which see coarse brutes. Perhaps they may be really nice, some of them, but as I look at them one after another, the thought always comes, how revolting could they appear in the eyes of their wives? This is not nice of me, and I am sure grandmamma would reprove me for it.

CHAPTER III

Next day, Sunday, some of us went to church. Augustus insisted upon my going. He thought it would be a good opportunity of showing I was in Lady Tilchester's company, although what it could have mattered to the Harley villagers I do not know.

He himself stayed behind with Lady Grenellen, he said, to take her for a walk in the woods.

After lunch every one seemed to play bridge but Lady Tilchester and I and her politician and the weak-eyed Duke. We climbed the hill to the ruins of the old castle and there sat until tea-time.

"Isn't it a bore for me that I shall have to marry an heiress?" the Duke said, pathetically. "Marriage is the most tiresome ennui at any time, but to be forced through sheer beggary to take some ugly woman you don't like and don't want is cruel hard luck, is it not?"

"Yes," I said, feelingly.

He was melted by the sympathy in my voice.

"You are a delicious woman; you seem to understand one directly. People have got into the way of thinking it is no hardship to have to do these things for the sake of one's title, but I can see you are sympathetic."

"Yes, indeed!" I said.

"Cordelia Grenellen is arranging it for me. I have not seen her yet—I mean the heiress."

"If I were a man I think I should keep my freedom and —and—work," I faltered.

He looked at me, perfectly astonished.

"But what can I do?" he asked. "Only go into the city, and that is quite played out now. I have no head for business, and it would seem to me to be rather mean just to trade upon my name to get unsuspecting people to take shares in concerns; whereas if I marry an heiress it is a square game—I at least give her some return for her money."

"There is a great deal in what you say," I agreed.

"I told Cordelia—she is a cousin of mine, you know—I told her I would not have a very ugly one, and I should prefer that she should be a good, healthy brewer's daughter. Our family is over-well bred. You see, if you are going to sacrifice yourself to keep up your name, you may as well choose some one that will be of some ultimate use to it. Now we want a strain of thick red blood in our veins; ours is a great deal too blue. We are becoming reedy shaped, and more or less idiotic."

He said all this quite gravely. He had evidently studied the subject, and as I looked at him I felt he was perfectly right. If he represented the type of his race, it had certainly grown effete.

"I won't have an American," he continued. "They are intellectual companions before marriage, and they are generally so agreeable you don't notice how nervous and restless they are really, but I would not contemplate one as a wife. I must have a solid English cow-woman."

He stretched himself by my side and began pulling a bit of grass to pieces. His hands look transparent, and he has the most beautifully shaped filbert nails; his ears, on the contrary, are not perfect, but stick out like a monkey's.

"You see, I should always live my own life," he went on, lazily. "I worship the beautiful. The pagans' highest expression of beauty which moved the world was in sculpture—cold and pure marble of divine form. That

awakened their emotions; one reads they had a number of emotions. The Renaissance people, to take a medium time, expressed themselves by painting glorious colors on flat canvas; they also had emotions. Those two arts now are more or less dead. At any rate, they have ceased to influence masses of people. Our great expression is music. We are moved by music. It gives us emotions *en bloc*—all of us—some by the tune of 'Tommy Atkins,' and others by Wagner. Well, all these three—sculpture, painting, and music—give me pleasure, but I should not want my cow duchess to understand any of them. I should want her to have numbers of chubby children and to fulfil her social duties, and never have to go into a rest-cure, or have a longing for sympathy."

I said a few "yeses" and "reallys" during this long speech, and he continued, like a mill grinding coffee:

"It don't do to over-breed. You are bound to turn out some *toqués* if not altogether idiotic, and then my sense of beauty is outraged by the freaks that happen in our shapes—you should see my two sisters, the plainest women in England. Now you give me joy to look at. You are quite beautiful, you know. I never saw any one with a nose as straight and finely cut as yours. Why do you keep putting your parasol so that I cannot see it?"

"One uses a parasol to keep off the sun, which is hot. Would you wish me to get a sunstroke to oblige you?" And I put down my parasol still lower.

"You are selfish!" in an aggrieved voice.

"Of course."

"And not the least ashamed of it!"

"Not the least."

He moved his position deliberately so that he came to my other side, where the sun was not.

"I learned a certain amount of manœuvring in South

Africa, where I went for a month or two," he said. "I hope this side of your face will be as pretty. People always have a better and a worse side."

I laughed. It was too hot to circumvent him again, and his looking at me could not hurt me.

"This side is even prettier," he said, presently. "Where did you hide yourself, that we none of us ever saw you before you married?"

"I lived rather near here for a little while."

"Now you look sad again. I never watched any one's face so much. Yours is not like other people's; you look like a cameo, you know."

"Tell me about the people here," I said. "They are all strangers to me."

"But I would much rather talk about you."

"That does not interest me; you said I was selfish, so you do what I wish."

"What can I tell you of them? They are like all companies—dull and amusing, mixed. They are a fair specimen of most people one meets in the *monde où l'on s'amuse*. My cousin Lady Grenellen is perhaps the most interesting among them, as she has had the most histories."

"Histories?"

"Yes; her career has been one of riding for a series of falls, and escaping even a peck."

"She is very lovely."

"Oh, yes, Cordelia is good-looking enough," he said, as though there was considerably more to add.

I did not continue the subject further. We talked of books, the war, and various other things, and by-and-by our hostess called to us from the higher level of the old drawbridge where she was sitting.

"We must be descending for some tea," she said, and started on with her politician.

When we got back, Augustus was swinging Lady Grenellen in a lovely Louis XV *balançoire,* fixed up between two elm-trees; she put one foot out, and looked so lovely and radiant!

Augustus had the expression of one of those negro pages Thackeray drew in *The Virginians*—a mixture of pride and self-complacency—as he held the red silk ropes.

Tea was so merry! No one was witty like grandmamma and the Marquis, but every one was in a good temper and it was gay.

The party was rather more punctual at dinner on Sunday night, and Lady Tilchester had arranged, as she meant to the night before, that I should sit next her politician. Mr. Budge and Mrs. Gurrage—the names went well together!

I do not know anything about politics, but he is what I suppose must be a Radical, as he preaches equal rights for all mankind, and an apologetic tone to other nations, and a general dividing up of all one's *biens.* But they say he has a splendid house in Grosvenor Square, and a flat in Paris, and never asks any but the smartest titled people to his big pheasant shoot in Suffolk.

He was delightful at dinner, anyway, and made me laugh. His voice is clear, with just the faintest touch of Irish in it. And he sparred with Lady Tilchester across me.

She is the greatest *grande dame* one could meet, and a Tory to the backbone in politics, but her manner to the servants is not nearly so haughty as Mr. Budge's.

I do not like his hands; I cannot say why; they are neither big nor ill-shapen, but there is something fat and feminine about the fingers. I dare say, underneath, he could be like Augustus.

Lady Tilchester is devoted to him, and he has the great-

est admiration and respect for her. Their conversation is most interesting.

Some of the other men are very nice, and several of them almost come up to grandmamma's criterion of the perfect male—that he should "look like a man and behave like a gentleman."

The women are very smartly dressed all the time, but they do not show a great sense of the fitness of things. Only Lady Grenellen and Lady Tilchester are always adorable and attractive in anything and in any way.

I believe they do not love one another very much, although they are quite friendly; one somehow can see it in their eyes.

The Tilchester boy, who is thirteen, has just gone to Eton, but will soon be home for the holidays; the little girl is at the sea. So I have not seen either of them.

The whole house here is so beautifully done; there is no fuss, and everything is exactly where one wants to find it. I shall be sorry when we leave.

Just as we had begun luncheon to-day, Sir Antony Thornhirst came in, and, after a casual greeting to every one, sat down near me.

He seems quite at home here, and as if he were accustomed to turning up unannounced in this way.

I felt such a queer, quick beating in my heart. I suppose because among all these strangers he was some one I knew before.

"So you decided not to cut the Gordian knot," he said, presently, as if we were continuing the discussion of some argument we had had a moment before.

He bridged in an instant the great gulf since my wedding. This *sang froid* stupefied me. I found nothing to say.

He continued:

"Do you know, I have heard since that to give any one a knife cuts friendship, and brings bad luck and separation, and numbers of dreadful things. So you and I are now declared enemies, I suppose. Shall we go and throw the little ill-omen in the lake after lunch?"

"No; I will not part with my knife; I find it very useful," I said, in a *bête* way.

"Antony," called out Lord Tilchester, "you have arrived in the nick of time to save Babykins from turning into a hospital nurse. She thinks the costume becoming, and threatens to leave us for the wounded heroes. Cannot you restrain her?"

"How?" asked Sir Antony, helping himself to some chicken curry. "Really excellent curry your chef makes, Tilchester."

"Don't tell him about it, Reggie," lisped Mrs. Parton-Mills. "The unfeeling creature is only thinking of his food."

"You seem to have all the qualities for an ideal convalescent nurse," said Sir Antony, with an air of detaching himself with difficulty from the contemplation of the curry.

"And those qualities are—?" asked Lord Tilchester.

"Principally stimulating," and he selected a special chutney from the various kinds a footman was handing.

"What do you mean?" demanded Babykins, pouting.

"Exactly what you do," and he looked at her, smiling in a way I should have said was insolent had it been I who was concerned.

"But I want to go and help the poor dear fellows, and to cheer them and make their time pleasanter."

"I said you would be an ideal convalescent nurse. But what would become of the pigs?"

"Oh, Edward could look after them. I think too little

attention has been paid to the poor boys who are getting well. I could read to them and write their letters home for them," and she looked pathetically sympathetic.

"Hubble-bubble, toil and trouble," quoted Sir Antony.

"Who for?" laughed Lord Tilchester, in his rough, gruff way.

"The recipients of the letters, who would certainly receive them in the wrong envelopes," said Sir Antony. "I think, Tilchester, you had better persuade Babykins to stay in England, for the sake of the peace of many respectable and innocent families."

"How wicked you are to me," flashed Babykins.

"Just what you deserve," chuckled Lord Tilchester.

"What tiresome nonsense these people talk," said Sir Antony, calmly, to me. "You and I were in the middle of an interesting problem discussion, were we not? And now I have lost the thread."

"It does not in the least matter," I said.

The Duke, who was on the other side of me, did not care to be left out, and persistently talked to me for the rest of lunch.

Sir Antony consumed his with the appreciation of a connoisseur. It appeared to be the only thing which interested him.

Babykins, from the other side, did her utmost to engage him in a war of wits, but he remained calm, with the air of a placid lion.

When we got outside in the great tent he came up to me.

"I am going to take you for a walk," he said—"a nice, cool walk in the woods. Will you get your parasol?"

The Duke was at that moment fetching it for me from the hall table, where I had left it.

"I do not know what we shall do to-day," I said. "I believe I am going to play croquet."

"Oh, no, you are not. It is much too hot, and you must see the woods. They are historical, and— Here, take this parasol and let us start." This last hurriedly, as the Duke was seen returning with mine.

I cannot say why I allowed myself to be dragged off like this. My natural impulse has always been to do the opposite thing when ordered by any one but grandmamma. But here I found myself walking meekly beside my kinsman down a yew-bordered path, holding a mauve silk parasol over my head which did not belong to me.

We did not speak until we got quite to the end, where there is a quaint fountain, the centre of four *allées* of clipped yews.

My heart still continued to beat in a quick, tiresome manner.

"You look changed, Comtesse," Sir Antony said. "Your little face is pale. Do you remember the night we danced together? It was round and rosy then. Is it a hundred years ago?"

There is a something in his voice which is alluring. The mocking sound goes out of it now and then, and when it does one feels as if one must listen. Oh, but listen with both one's ears!

"Yes, it is a hundred years ago," I said.

"I was so sorry to hear of your grandmother's death," he continued. "I wanted to tell you how I felt for you, but I was away in Norway, and have only just returned. Did you think I was unkind?"

"No, I never thought at all. Grandmamma was glad to die. I knew she could not live, but it came suddenly at the end."

"What a splendid personality! How I wish I had seen more of her! I generally manage to seize the occasion,

but fate kept you and her beyond my reach. Why did we not all meet this time last year?"

"Oh, do not talk of that!" I cried. I felt I could not bear to hear any more. "I am trying to forget, and to find life full of compensations. Grandmamma and the Marquis promised me that I should."

He looked at me, stopped in the path, and bent down to a level with my face. His eyes seemed as if they could see right through my mind then, as on another occasion in our lives.

"Dear little white Comtesse!" he said. Almost the same words.

An emotion that is new to me happened. It was as if my heart beat in my throat.

"We are dawdling by this fountain," I said. "Where are the woods?"

After that we were gay. He told me of many things. I seemed to see a clear picture of the world as he talked —a light and pleasant world, where no one was so foolish as to care for anything seriously.

One felt a donkey, to worry or grieve when the sun shone and the birds sang!

How I enjoyed myself!

"Has Babykins chirped at you yet?" he asked, presently. "She is very dangerous when she chirps."

"I do not like her," I said.

"Oh, you will presently. We all love Babykins. She acts as a sort of moral mosquito in a big party. She flies around stinging every one, and then we compare our bites and tear and scratch the irritated places together. You will meet her everywhere—she is the only person Tilchester takes a serious interest in."

"Are you staying here," I asked, "or did you only drive over?"

"I sent for my servant to bring my things, and I shall stay now I find you. You always seem to forget we are cousins, and that people ought to take an interest in their relations!"

"Tell me about your house—Dane Mount it is called, is it not?" I asked, presently. We had been silent for a moment, walking down a shady path, great pine-trees on each side.

"No, I won't tell you about it; you must come over there some day and stop with me for a night or so. You ought to see the home of your ancestors, you know. Promise me you will when I come back from Scotland!"

We had gone deep into the wood by now. It was quite dusky. The thick trees met overhead, and only an occasional sunbeam penetrated through.

I felt stupid. The words did not come so easily as when I am with the Duke.

"How silent you are, Comtesse!"

"Is it not time to go back?" I said, stupidly.

"No, not nearly time. I want you to tell me all about yourself—where you lived, and all that happened until you flashed into my life at the Tilchester ball. See, we will sit down on this log of wood and be quite comfortable."

We sat down.

"Now begin, Comtesse: 'Once upon a time, when I was a little girl, I came from—where?'"

"Do you really want to hear the family history?" I asked.

"Yes."

I told him an outline of things and how grandmamma and I had lived at the cottage, and of all her wise sayings, and about the Marquis and Roy and Hephzibah, and the simple things of my long-ago past. It seemed as if I was speaking of some other person, so changed has all my out-

look on life and things become since I went to Paris with Augustus.

"And now we come to the day we met in the lane," he said. "You were not even engaged then, were you?"

"Oh, no! Grandmamma had never had a fainting fit; she would have found the idea too dreadful at that time." I stopped suddenly, realizing what I had said. I could not tell him how and why I had married Augustus; he must think what he pleased.

He evidently thought a good deal, by the look in his eyes. I wish—I wish when he looks it did not make my heart beat so; it is foolish and uncomfortable.

"What a fool I was not to come with the automobile the night before your wedding and carry you off to Gretna Green," he said, in a voice that might have been mocking or serious, I could not tell which.

"Tell me, Comtesse, if I had tapped at your window, would you have looked out and come with me?"

"There was a bad thunder-storm, if I recollect. We should have got wet," I laughed, in a hollow way. He could not know how he was hurting me; he should not see, at all events.

"You would have been very dear to take to Gretna Green," he continued. "I should have loved to watch your wise, sweet eyes changing all expressions as morning dawned and you found yourself away from them all—away from Augustus."

I did not answer. I drew hieroglyphics with the point of the mauve parasol in the soft moss beneath our feet.

"Why don't you speak, Comtesse?"

"There is nothing to say—I am married—and you did not tap at the window—and let us go back to the house."

CHAPTER IV

The last evening at Harley is one of the things I shall not want to recall. Augustus got drunk—yes, it is almost too dreadful to write even. I had not realized up to this that gentlemen (of course I do not mean that word literally, as applied to Augustus, but I mean people with money and a respectable position)—I never realized that they got drunk. I thought it was only common men in the street.

It struck me he was making a great noise at dinner, but as he was sitting on the same side of the table as I was I could not see. When the men joined us afterwards it came upon me as a thunder-clap. His face was a deep heliotrope, and he walked unsteadily—not really lurching about, but rather as if the furniture was in the way.

One or two of the men seemed very much amused, especially when he went and pushed himself into the sofa where Lady Grenellen was sitting and threw his arm along the back behind her head. I felt frozen. I could not have risen from my chair for a few moments. She, however, did not seem to mind at all; she merely laughed continuously behind her fan, the men helping her to ridicule Augustus.

For me it was an hour of deep humiliation. It required all my self-control to go on talking to Babykins as if nothing had happened.

The Duke came over and joined us. He drew a low chair and sat down so that I could not see the hilarious sofa-party.

I have not the least idea what he said or what any of us said. The guffaws of laughter in Augustus's thick voice was all I was conscious of.

Sir Antony Thornhirst, who had stopped to speak to Lady Tilchester by the billiard-room door, now came over to us. He stood by me for a moment, then crossed to Lady Grenellen.

"They are wanting you to play bridge in the blue drawing-room," he said.

She rose quite reluctantly, still overcome with mirth. Augustus tried to get up, too, but stumbled back into the sofa.

Then, with infinite tact, my kinsman attracted his attention, said some thrilling thing about the war, and, as Lady Grenellen moved off and Augustus made another ineffectual attempt to rise and follow her, Sir Antony sat down in her vacant place and for half an hour conversed with my husband. Oh, I force myself to write the words "my husband." It is to keep the hideous fact in remembrance, otherwise I might let myself express aloud the loathing and contempt I feel for him.

Sir Antony had never before taken the least notice of him beyond the most casual politeness, and now, from the scraps of conversation that my preternaturally sharpened ears could catch, he seemed to be trying his best to interest and retain Augustus beside him. Gradually the whole company dispersed into the different drawing-rooms as usual, and I followed the rest to look at the bridge.

As I was passing the sofa where the two men were sitting, Augustus seized hold of my dress.

"Don't look so damned haughty, little woman," he hiccoughed. "Er—I'm all right—give me a kiss——"

"As I was going to tell you," interrupted Sir Antony, "I

heard for a fact that the rest of the Tilchester Yeomanry that have escaped so long are going to volunteer to go out, after all."

Augustus dropped my dress. His face got paler. This information seemed to sober him for an instant, and in that blessed interval I got away and into the blue drawing-room. Lady Tilchester was not playing bridge, and she sat down in the window-seat beside me. It was a lovely night, and the windows were wide open.

She is the most delightful companion. I am beginning to know her a little and to realize how much there is to know.

To-night she was more than usually fascinating. It seemed as if she wished to make me forget everything but the pleasure in our conversation. She has a vast knowledge of books, and has even read all the French classics that grandmamma loved. We talked of many things, and, among them, gardens. She told me that I must make a new garden at Ledstone, and I would find it an immense interest; and she spoke so kindly of Mrs. Gurrage, and said how charitable she was and good-hearted, and then delicately, and as if it had no bearing upon the Gurrage case, hinted that in these days money was the only thing needed to make an agreeable society for one's self, and that in the future I must have plenty of amusement.

Insensibly my heart became lightened.

She talked to me of grandmamma, too, and drew me into telling her things about our past. She was interested in grandmamma's strange bringing-up of me, so different, she said, to the English girls of the present day.

"And is it that, I wonder, which has turned you into almost as great a cynic as Antony Thornhirst? He is the greatest I know."

"But can one be a cynic if one has so kind a heart?" I asked.

She looked at me quickly with a strange look.

"How have you discovered that so soon? Most people would not credit him with having any heart at all," she said. "You know with all his immense prestige and popularity people are a little afraid of him. I think one would sum up the impression of Antony as a man who never in all his life has been, or will be, called 'Tony.'"

Her voice was retrospecting.

"You have known him very long?" I questioned.

"Every since I married, fourteen years ago. I remember I saw him first at my wedding. He and Tilchester had, of course, been old friends, always living so near each other. We are exactly the same age—thirty-four, both of us. Growing old, you see!" She laughed softly, then she continued:

"Antony was never like other men exactly. He is original, and extraordinarily well read—only casually one would never guess it. He wastes his life rather, though. I wish he would go into Parliament. He has a habit of rushing off on long travels. Some years ago he went off suddenly and was away for ages and ages—about five years, I think. Then he stayed at Dane Mount for a while, and then, when the war first began, he went out there, and has only been home a year."

"He never speaks of himself nor what he does, I notice."

"No; that is just his charm. I should like you to see Dane Mount. It is far nicer than this, and he has wonderful taste. It is the most comfortable house I know. He has delightful parties there when the shooting begins."

"It would interest me to see it, because grandpapa came from there," I said.

"Of course, you are cousins, in a way. You don't know how interested Antony was in you that night after the Tilchester Yeomanry ball. He came and sat in my sitting-room and talked to me about you, and then it was he put two and two together and discovered you were related. I had heard that evening about your grandmother and you living at the cottage, and was able to give him some information. I don't think he realized when you met that you were connected, did he?"

"No, not at all."

"A friend of mine and I were sitting by the fire, having said good-night to the rest of the party—do you remember what a cold May night it was? Antony came in and joined us. We all had admired you so. I recollect this is one of the things he said: "'I met an eighteenth-century marquise to-night.'"

"Yes, he called me that."

"He is so very hard to please. The ordinary women, like Babykins and Cordelia Grenellen, don't understand his subtle wit. They are generally in love with him, though. Cordelia was madly *éprise* last autumn; but he is as indifferent as possible, and does not trouble himself about any of them. He is reported to have said once that it had taken him five years to degrade himself sufficiently to be able to enjoy the society of modern women. He is a wonderful cynic!"

"The Duke gave me to understand that no man of the world was ever without some affair," I said.

"Well, I suppose it is true more or less, but Antony is always the person who holds the cheek, hardly even complacently—generally with perfect indifference. I have never known him, for years, put himself out an inch for any woman."

I don't know why, but this conversation interested me deeply.

Just then some one came and joined us at the window, and Lady Tilchester had to rise and talk with her other guests; but before she moved off she put her hand on my arm and said, as if she had only then remembered it:

"Oh, the housekeeper let me know just now that some soot had fallen in your chimney. I do hope you won't mind sleeping in a tiny bedroom off mine, just for to-night. We were so afraid the smell would keep you awake. Your maid has moved your things."

Dear and kind lady! I will never forget your goodness to me nor cease to love you.

It was pouring rain as we drove home next day.

Augustus and I only met as we were ready to get into the carriage. I had breakfasted in my room.

His face was the color of putty, and he had that look in his eyes which, I remember, long ago I used to say appeared as if he had not had enough sleep. His expression was sulky and morose, and I was thankful when at last we started.

The guests were catching all sorts of trains. There were casual good-byes. Lady Tilchester was not down, and no one occupied themselves much with any one.

Lady Grenellen left just before us. She did not take the least notice of me, but she talked in a caressing way to Augustus, and I heard him say:

"Now, you won't forget! It is a bargain!" in the most *empressé* voice, as he pulled his head out of the carriage-window.

For the first mile or two of our journey neither of us spoke. Augustus lit a cigarette and smoked in a ner-

vous way, and kept opening and shutting the window.

Then he swore at me. I will not say the words he used, but the sentence ended with a demand why I sat there looking like a "stuck pig."

I told him quietly that if he spoke to me like that I would not reply at all.

He got very angry and said he would have none of that nonsense; that I seemed to forget that I was his wife, and that he could do as he pleased with me.

"No, you cannot," I said. "I will not be spoken to like that."

"You'll be spoken to just as I jolly well please," was his refined reply. "Sitting there like a white wax-doll, and giving yourself the airs of a duchess!"

I did not answer.

"A deaf and dumb doll, too," he said, with an oath.

He then asked where I had been all night, and what I had meant by daring to stay away from him.

I remained perfectly silent, which, I fear, was infinitely provoking, but I could not stoop to bandy words with him.

He began to bluster, and loaded me with every coarse abuse and a tremendous justification of himself and his behavior of the night before. I had not mentioned the subject or accused him of anything, but he assured me he had not been the least drunk and that my haughtiness was enough to drive any man mad.

When at least ten minutes of this torrent had spent itself a little, I said the whole subject was so disagreeable to me and discreditable to him that he had better not talk of it and I would try and forget it.

Grandmamma often told me how her grandfather, the husband of Ambrosine Eustasie, had refused to fight with a man of low birth who had insulted him, but had sent one of his valets to throw the creature into the street, because

in those days a gentleman only crossed swords with his equals. I now understood his feelings. I could not quarrel with Augustus, the whole situation was so impossible.

I tried to tell myself that it did not in the least matter what he said and did. Then, as he continued abusing me, I repeated a bit of Béranger to myself, and so grew unconscious, at last, of the words he was saying.

Silence came eventually, and then, after a while, in quite a humble voice, Augustus said:

"I say, little woman—er—you won't tell the mater—er—will you?"

Something touched me in his face—his common, unpleasant face. The bluster was gone and there was a piteousness in it. I felt a slight lump in my throat.

"Oh, no; do not fear," I said.

Then he called me an angel and kissed me many times, and that was the worst of all.

Oh! When the year is up, will the "monotonous complacency" have set in?

CHAPTER V

The days are flying by. October has almost come, and the damp and the falling leaves. It will soon be time for Mrs. Gurrage to depart for Bournemouth.

Augustus is in a continual ferment, as the report that the rest of the Tilchester Yoemanry are going to volunteer for active service has cropped up frequently, and, while he likes the uniform and what he considers the prestige of belonging to such a corps, he has no ardor for using his weapons.

I have tried very hard to take an interest in the matter, but the numbness has returned. The oppression of the surroundings at Ledstone cramps my spirit.

We have had several "parties"—batches of Gurrage relations—one or two really awful people. And some days ago I was bidden to write and invite the guests for the first big partridge drive.

"The mater will be gone to Bournemouth," Augustus said, "and you'll have to stand on your own legs."

Matrimony has not cured him of his habit of using horrid phrases.

He has often been very rude to me lately, and has taken to going more frequently to town for the day, and stays away for a night or two sometimes.

These seem to me as holidays, and I have never thought of asking him where he has been, although he comes back with an apologetic air of a guilty school-boy which ought to excite my jealousy, I feel sure.

During these absences his mother looks uneasy and has once or twice asked me if I know where he is.

My books have come—quantities of books!—and I spend hours in my boudoir, never lifting my eyes from the pages to be distracted by the glaring, mustard-brocade walls around me.

Mrs. Gurrage treats me with respect. There is a gradual but complete change in her manner to me, from what cause I do not know. I am invariably polite to her and consider all her wishes, and she often tells me she is very proud of me; but all trace of the familiarity she exercised towards me in the beginning has disappeared.

I am sorry for her, as she is deeply anxious, also, about this question of the Yeomanry going to the war.

Augustus is still her idol.

Perhaps I am wicked to be so indifferent to them all. Perhaps it is not enough just to submit and to have gentle manners. I ought to display interest; but I cannot—oh, I cannot.

It is the very small things that jar upon me—their sordid views upon no matter what question—the importance they attach to trifles.

Sometimes in the afternoons, after tea, Amelia reads the *Family Herald* to Mrs. Gurrage.

"A comfort it was to me in my young days, me dear," she often tells me.

The delinquencies of the house-maids are discussed at dinner, the smallest piece of gossip in Tilchester society.

I cannot, try as I will, remember the people's different names, or whom Miss Jones is engaged to, or whom Miss Brown. Quantities of these people come out to tea, and those afternoons are difficult to bear. I feel very tired when evening comes, after having had to sit there and

hear them talk. Their very phraseology is as of a different world.

Augustus has not been drunk since the night at Harley, but often I think his eyes look as if he had had too much to drink, and it is on these occasions he is rude to me.

I believe in his heart he is very fond of me still, but his habit of bullying and blustering often conceals it.

He continually accuses me of being a cold statue, and regrets that he has married a lump of ice. And when I ask him in what way I could please him better, he says I must love him.

"I told you before we were married that I never should, but I would be civil to you," I said to him at last, exasperated beyond all endurance. "You agreed to the bargain, and I do my best to keep it. I never disobey you or cross you in a single thing. What have you to complain of?"

"Everything!" he said, in a fury, thumping the table so hard that a little Dresden-china figure fell down and broke into pieces on the parquet floor. "Everything! Your great eyes are always sad. You never take the least interest in anything about any of us. You are docile—yes; and obedient—yes; and when I hold you in my arms I might be holding a stuffed doll for all the response you make. And when I kiss you, you shudder!"

He walked up and down the room excitedly.

"Oh, we have all noticed it!" he continued. "You are polite, and quiet, and—and—damned cold! Does Amelia ever let herself go before you? Never! The mater herself feels it. You are as different to any of us as if you came from Mars!"

"But you knew that always. You used to tell me that was what you liked about me," I said, wearily. "I cannot change my nature any more than—than Amelia can hers."

"Why not, pray?"

"Have you never thought," I said, driven at last to defend myself, "that there may be a side in the question for me also? I feel it is badly as you do—your all being different to me."

He stopped in his angry walk and looked at me. This idea was one of complete newness to him.

"Well, you'd better get out of it and change, for we sha'n't," he said, at last. "You owe everything to me. You would have been in the gutter now if I had not had the generosity to marry you."

I did not answer, but I suppose my eyes spoke, for he came close up to me and shook his fist in my face.

"I'll break that proud spirit of yours—see if I don't!" he roared—"daring to look at me like that! What good are you to me, I should like to know? You do not have a child, and, of all things, I want an heir!"

A low growl came from the hearth-rug, where Roy had been lying, and the dear dog rose and came to my side. I was afraid he would fly at Augustus, shaking his fist as if he was going to strike me. I put my hand on Roy's soft, black head and held his collar.

In a moment Augustus turned round and rushed to the door.

"I'll have that dog poisoned," he said, as he fled from the room.

I took up a volume of La Rochefoucauld, which was lying on the table near—grandmamma's copy—and I chanced to open it at this maxim:

"On n'est jamais si heureux ni si malheureux qu'on s'imagine."

About happiness I do not know, but for the rest—well, I must tell myself that to feel miserable is only foolish imagination, when I have a fire, and food, and a diamond

necklace, and three yards of pearls, and a carriage with prune-and-scarlet servants, and a boudoir with mustard-silk walls, and—and numbers of other things.

Roy put his nose into my hand.

"Why did we not go on the long journey with grandmamma?" I said to him. And then I remembered that it is ridiculous to be morbid and dramatic, and so I rang for my maid—a dour Scotchwoman whom I like—and told her to bring my out-door things here to the boudoir-fire. And soon Roy and I were a mile from the house.

Lady Tilchester has been in Scotland almost ever since we spent our four days at Harley. When she comes back I shall ask her if she will come over here. She may help me to awake.

I am sure if any one could read what I have written, they would say that poor Augustus had a great deal to put up with in having a wife like me. Probably, from his point of view, I am thoroughly tiresome and irritating. I do not exonerate myself.

After a brisk walk I felt better, and by lunch-time was able to come back to the house and behave as usual. Augustus, I found, had gone to London.

Mrs. Gurrage was uneasy. She dropped her h's once or twice, a sure sign, with her, of perturbation and excitement.

When the servants had left the room she said to Amelia:

"Quite time you were off with that basket for Mary Higginson."

And Amelia took the hint meekly and got up from her seat, leaving a pear unfinished.

"Shut the door, now, and don't stand loitering there!" my mother-in-law further commanded.

Amelia is a poor relation, and has often to put up with unfinished manners.

"Look here, my dear," Mrs. Gurrage said, when she felt sure we were alone, "I don't like it—and that's flat!"

"What do you not like?" I said, respectfully.

"Gussie's goings-on! If you tried to coax him more he would not be forever rushin' up to London to see that viscountess of his. I wonder you don't show no spark of jealousy. Law! I'd have scratched her eyes out had she interfered between me and Mr. Gurrage as she is doing between you two, even if she was a duchess!"

"I do not understand," I said.

"Well, you must have your eyes glued shut," Mrs. Gurrage continued, emphatically. "That Lady Grenellen, I mean. A nice viscountess she is, lookin' after other people's husbands! Why, you can't never have even glanced at the letters Gussie's got from her!"

"Oh, but *of course* not!"

"Well, I have. My suspicions began to be aroused directly after you got back from Harley. I caught sight of a coronet on the envelope" (Mrs. Gurrage pronounces it "envellup"), "and I said to myself, there's something queer in that, Gussie never sayin' a word—he as would be so proud of a letter with a crown on it."

"Yes," I said. I felt sorry for her, she was so agitated. All the veneer knowledge of grammar had left her, and she spoke with a broad, natural accent.

"The next one that came—and never a word from him made me sure—so, I thought to myself, I'll make certain, and I opened the bag myself with my key for a few mornings—I came down early before him on purpose—and soon I sees another gold crown and great, sprawly writin'. The kettle was singing. It took me no time to get the gum unstuck, and—well there! My dear, you

never did! I blush to think of it. The hussy! She was thankin' him for a diamond bracelet. Now I know my son Gussie well enough to know he did not give her that bracelet for nothing. Then she said as how he might come on Tuesday to see her, as she would be passin' through London and would be at her town-house for the day.

"But please don't tell me—it—oh, one ought never to read other people's letters!" I exclaimed.

Mrs. Gurrage flushed scarlet.

"There! That's just you—your high and mighty sentiments! And why, pray, shouldn't a mother watch over her son, even if his wife has not the spirit to?"

I did not answer.

"There! It's been so from the first. I thought you'd have been proud and glad to marry my Gussie—you, as poor as a rat! I don't set no store by our wealth—the Lord's doin', and Mr. Gurrage takin' advantage of the opportunities, his partner dyin' youngish—but I liked the idea of your bein' high-born, and I was frightened about Gussie's lookin' at that girl at the Ledstone Arms. And you seemed good and quiet and well-brought-up. And Gussie just doted on you. You ought to have jumped at him, but you and your grandma were that proud! All the time you were engaged you were as haughty as if you were honorin' *him,* instead of his honorin' you! Since you've been my daughter-in-law, I have no cause to complain of you, only it's the feelin', and your settin' quiet and far away, when a flesh-and-blood woman would have clawed that viscountess's hair! Gussie'd never have been after her if you'd show'd a little more affection. You're not a bad-lookin' woman yourself if you wasn't so white."

"Do let us understand each other," I said. "I told your

son from the first that I did not care for him. My grandmother was old and dying. We had no relations to depend upon. I should have been left, as Augustus was unchivalrous enough to tell me this morning, 'in the gutter.' These reasons seemed strong enough to my grandmother to make her deem it expedient that I should marry some one. There was no time to choose—I had never dreamed in my life of disobeying her. She told me to marry Augustus. This situation was fully explained to him, and he understood and kept us to the bargain. I have endeavored in every way to fulfil my side, but in it I never contemplated a supervision of his letters."

"Oh, indeed! And why couldn't you love him, pray? A finer young man doesn't live for miles round," Mrs. Gurrage said, with great offence. The other questions seemed in abeyance for the moment.

"We cannot force our likes and dislikes," I said.

"Well, you are married now, and part and parcel of him, and a wife's duty is to keep her own husband from hussies—viscountesses or no they can call themselves."

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Why, tax him with it when he comes home to-night. Let him see you know and won't stand it. It's all your fault for not lovin' him, and your duty now's to keep him in the path of virtue."

"May I say you informed me of his behavior? Because how otherwise could I account for my knowledge? He would know I should never have thought of opening or looking at his letters myself."

Mrs. Gurrage was not the least ashamed of having done this, to me, most dishonorable thing. She could not see the matter from my point of view.

I remember grandmamma once told me that servants

and people of the lower classes always think it is their right to read any one's letters they come across, so I suppose my mother-in-law cannot help her standard of honor being different to ours.

"You mustn't make mischief between my boy and me," she said. "You must invent something—think of some other way."

"But I cannot tell a lie about it. I shall say you have received disquieting information; I will not say how. Otherwise, I will not speak to him at all about it."

Mrs. Gurrage burst into tears.

"There—it's breakin' my heart!" she sobbed, "and you don't care a brass farthing!"

"Of course I care," I said, feebly.

Oh, grandmamma! For once you must have been wrong, and it would have been better for me to have worked in the gutter! I wonder if you felt that at the end. But we had given our word. Augustus held us to it, and no Calincourt had ever broken his word.

By the afternoon post came a letter from Sir Antony Thornhirst. He had returned from Scotland, he said, and hoped we would soon pay him our promised visit.

It was a short note, dry and to the point, with nothing in it unnecessary in the way of words. I do not know why I read it over several times. His writing gave me comfort. I felt as if there was some one human who would understand things.

When I was dressing for dinner, Augustus returned. He shuffled into the room without knocking, while McGreggor was brushing my hair.

He seemed to have forgotten the scene of the morning, and was in a most amiable mood. He had brought me

a new muff chain, in wonderfully good taste; he could never have chosen it himself. It is so difficult to thank people for things when you would like to throw them in the fire rather than receive them.

However, I did my best.

McGreggor felt it her duty to leave the room. Would this be a good opportunity to get over what I had promised my mother-in-law to say to Augustus? Oh, it was an ugly moment.

I told him, as simply as I could, that his mother was worried about him, fearing he had contracted a dangerous friendship with Lady Grenellen, and that I hoped he would make her mind at ease upon the subject.

He came over to me and seized my wrists. There was an air of conscious pride in his face. He was not displeased that this gallantry could be attributed to him.

"It's all your fault if I do look at any one else," he blustered; "and, anyway, a man of the world must have a little amusement, with such a dull, stuck-up wife at home as I have got. Cordelia is a darned sight higher rank than you are, and yet she does not give herself your mighty airs."

"Oh, do not think it matters to me," I said, as calmly as I could, "only it worries your mother, who spoke to me about it."

"If I thought you cared it would be different," Augustus said, delighted to grasp at this excuse.

"No, it would be just the same, only in that case it would grieve me, and I should suffer, whereas now—" I left the sentence unfinished. I do not know why.

"Now you don't care what I do or whether I am dead or alive—that is what you mean, I see," he said, dropping my wrists and walking towards the door.

"Augustus!" I called to him, and he came back. "Lis-

ten. You swore at me this morning. You were very rude to me, and you spend the day in London with another woman, and return bringing me a present. I have done my best not to resent these insults, but I warn you I will not stand any more."

He became cringing.

"Who's been telling the mater these stories about me?" he asked. "There's not a word of truth in them. It is a queer thing if a man may not speak to a woman without people making mischief about it!"

"That is between you and your mother. All I would like to know is that you will not swear at me in future and will treat me with more civility."

I felt I could not continue the subject of his "friendship" with Lady Grenellen. The whole matter seemed so low.

"Well, you are a brick, after all, not to kick up a row," Augustus said. "So let us kiss and be friends again, and I am sorry if I was nasty this morning. There! little woman, you need not be jealous," and he patted my hand, and then began twisting the long waves of my hair in and out of his thick fingers.

Of course, I ought to have been very jealous and angry, I am sure, but I could not feel the least emotion.

He then became more affectionate, telling me I was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, and that I had "stunning hair" and various other charms, and if only I would not be a lump of ice he would never leave me!

I could not say, as I felt, "But that is the one thing I should like you to do," so I said nothing, and, as soon as I could get near the bell unperceived, rang for McGreggor again, and put an end to the scene.

CHAPTER VI

Next morning at breakfast Augustus said: "As Farrington has refused for the 15th, you had better write and ask that fellow Thornhirst—your cousin. They tell me he is a capital shot, and I want my birds killed this year."

The year before, apparently, the party had been composed of indifferent marksmen, and the head keeper had spoken rather sarcastically upon the subject.

Augustus, when not bullying them, stands in great awe of his servants.

"I am afraid, with only this short notice, there is little chance of Sir Antony being disengaged," I remarked.

I somehow felt as if I did not want him to come to Ledstone. He would be so ridiculously out of place here.

"A keen shot would throw over any invitation he had had previously for such a chance as my two best days," Augustus replied, pompously, helping himself to a second kidney and smearing it with mustard. "You just write this morning, and ask him to wire reply."

"Very well," I said, reluctantly. He would certainly be engaged though, I need not fear. "I had a note from him yesterday, saying he had returned from Scotland, and asking us to go over soon and pay our promised visit to dine and sleep."

"There! I'll bet he was fishing for an invitation to this shoot," said Augustus, triumphantly. And, not content with the mustard he had already plastered the kidney with, he shook pepper over it, heaping it up upon his knife

first and agitating that implement with his fork to make the pepper fall evenly. I do not know why these details of the way he eats should irritate me so.

"Now, mind you catch the early post," he continued, "and tell him who the party are."

At fifteen minutes to eleven I found myself still staring irresolutely at the sheet of note-paper lying before me on the writing-table in my boudoir. It had the date written, and "Dear Sir Antony." The rest was a blank.

The little, brand-new Dresden clock on the mantelpiece chimed the three-quarters. The post leaves at eleven. I took up the pen and dashed at it.

"Eight guns are going to shoot partridges here on the 15th of October, and Augustus will be very pleased if you will make the ninth," I wrote. Could anything be more *bête?* "Please wire reply, and believe me, yours sincerely—" I hesitated again. Must I sign myself "Ambrosine de Calincourt Gurrage"? The strangest reluctance came over me.

It has always been a disagreeable moment when I have had to write "Gurrage," but never so disagreeable as now.

"A. de C. G.," I began. No, initials would not do—"urrage," I added, and the distance between the "G" and the "u" showed, I am afraid, that there was something unnatural about my signature.

"No one would accept such a stupid invitation as that," I said to myself, hopefully, as I folded the sheet and put it in the envelope. But by ten o'clock next day a telegram was handed to me:

"Very pleased to come on 15th. Many thanks.—ANTONY THORNHIRST.

So he will see the stuffed bears, and the negro figures,

and the Tottenham Court Road Louis XV. drawing-rooms, after all, whether I wish it or no!

Whether I wish it or no!

Augustus was delighted—not so much at the acceptance of this guest, but his own wonderful prehension.

"There! I told you he'd jump at it," he said.

For several days after this a good deal of my time was taken up by my mother-in-law's advice and directions as to how I should rule the house during her absence at Bournemouth, where she would be until she returned to spend Christmas with us.

It was a great wrench, one could see, to Mrs. Gurrage to relinquish even for this short two months her rule at Ledstone. But she was in so good a temper with me for what she considered I had done in bringing Augustus back "to the path of duty" (we have heard no more of Lady Grenellen) that she bestowed upon me her sceptre with a good grace.

At last the day came when Amelia, carrying the parrot, followed her into the brougham.

Augustus had preceded them to the station, and with infinite fuss of maids and footman, and stray cardboard boxes, and final directions, the whole party disappeared down the drive, and I was left standing on the red-granite steps.

A sudden sense of exaltation came over me.

I was alone for the first time since my wedding!

It would be evening before Augustus could return from seeing them off in London.

There was almost one whole day. What should I do? Where should I go?

Roy even barked with pleasure.

As I turned back into the house, the butler informed

me Hephzibah—Mrs. Prodgers—was waiting to see me.

Dear old nurse! She comes up rarely. She is radiantly happy with her grocer's man, and I think it grieves her to see me.

To-day it was to tell me that she had had an accident with one of the Sèvres cups, a chip having appeared in the handle.

She almost cried over it.

"Oh! If madam could know!" she said; then, "I dearly wish you would come back just to see how I have kept things," she added.

"Oh, Hephzibah, I will some day, but do not ask me yet! I—I should so miss grandmamma."

"You—you're happy, Miss Ambrosine?" she faltered, timidly. "Madam always knew best, you know. But I had a dream last night of your father, and he shook his fist at us—right there."

"Papa!" I felt startled. Our settled conviction had been so long that he was dead. "You dreamed of papa? Oh! Hephzibah, if he should still be alive!" I cried.

"There, there," she said, uneasily. "It is too late, anyway, my deary, but he'll understand that we could none of us stand against madam—if he should come back, ever. He—he—won't blame us."

I did not ask her what he should blame us for—her, poor soul! for having been unable to keep me with her, free; me for having submitted to the mutilation of my own life. Would papa blame us for this?

Kind, awkward, abrupt papa!

Hephzibah glanced round the room. It is the first time she had been in my boudoir since it was finished.

"Why won't you have up some of your things?" she said, at last. "It don't look like you, this grand place."

"No, it is not very like me, is it? But you see every-

thing is changed, and they would not do mixed, the old and the new. I am a new person." I sighed. "See—this book is the only thing I brought with me, besides the miniature of my great-great-grandmother," and I took up La Rochefoucauld tenderly.

"It don't feel like home," said Hephzibah, and then she suddenly burst into tears.

"Oh, my deary!" she sobbed. "And you so beautiful, and pale, and proud, and never saying a word, and they are none of them fit to black your boots."

"Oh, hush, hush, Hephzibah!" I said.

My voice calmed her. She looked round as though afraid that grandmamma would come in and scold her for crying.

"There! I am an old fool!" she whimpered. "But it is being so happy myself and knowing what real love is that makes me cry."

This picture of my dear old nurse as the heroine of a real love story was so pathetically comic that a lump, half tears, half laughter, rose in my own throat.

"I *am* so glad you are happy, Hephzibah," I said, unsteadily. "And of course I am happy, too. Come—I will show you the beautiful chain Mr. Gurrage gave me lately, and a set of new rings, a ruby, a sapphire, and a diamond, each stone as big as a peanut."

Hephzibah had not lived with grandmamma for years without acquiring a certain tact. She spoke no more of things that could trouble us, and soon we parted, smiling grimly at each other.

But the sense of exaltation was gone.

I could fly a little, like a bird round a large aviary. The bars were there beyond.

CHAPTER VII

It was odious weather, the afternoon of the 15th. Our eight guns had arrived in time for tea, some with wives, some without—one with a playful, giddy daughter. Men predominated.

There were some two or three decent people from the county round. The remainder, commercial connections, friends of the past.

One terrible woman, with parted, plastered hair and an aggressive voice and rustling silks, dominated the conversation. She is the wife of the brother of the late Mr. Gurrage's partner who "died youngish."

This couple come apparently every year to the best partridge drive. "Dodd" is their name.

Mrs. Dodd was extremely ill at ease among the other ladies, but was determined to let them know that she considered herself their superior in every way.

At the moment when she was recounting, in a strident voice, the shortcomings of one of her local neighbors, the butler announced:

"Sir Antony Thornhirst."

Our ninth gun had arrived.

"So good of you to ask me," he said, as he shook hands, and his voice sounded like smooth velvet after the others. And for a minute there was a singing in my ears.

"Jolly glad to see you," Augustus blustered. "What beastly weather! You motored over, I suppose?"

Sir Antony sat down by me.

I remembered the ways he would be accustomed to and did not introduce him to any one.

He had exchanged casual "How do you do's" with the neighbors he knew.

I poured him out some tea.

"I don't drink it," he said, "but give me some, and sugar, cream, and anything that will take time to put in."

I laughed.

"It is very long since we met at Harley, and I began to think you were going to forget me again, Comtesse!"

"Is that why you came here?"

"Yes—and because they tell me your keeper can show at least a hundred and fifty brace of partridges each day!"

"Augustus was right, then."

"What about?"

"He said you would come because of the number of the birds. I—I—felt sure you would be engaged."

"Your note was not cordial nor cousinly, and I was engaged, but the attraction of the game, as Mr. Gurrage says, decided me."

His smile had never looked so mocking nor his eyes so kind.

"Might I trouble you for a second cup, please, Mrs. Gussie?" the female Dodd interrupted, loudly, from half across the room. "Mr. McCormack is taking it over to you. And a little stronger this time, please. I don't care for this new-fangled taste for weak tea—dish-water, I call it—only fit for the jaded digestions of worn-out worldly women."

"Who owns this fog-horn?" my kinsman whispered. "Will it come out shooting to-morrow? The game-book record will be considerably lower, if so!"

"It won't shoot; it will only lunch," I whispered back.

Somehow, my spirits had risen. I loved to sit and laugh there with—Antony. (I think of him as Antony, now we are cousins, I must remember.)

I poured out the blackest tea I could, and inadvertently put a lump of sugar into it. I am afraid I was not attending.

Mr. McCormack, a big, burly youth, with a red face and fearfully nervous manners, stood first on one foot, then on the other, while he waited for the cup, which, eventually, he took back to Mrs. Dodd.

All this time Antony was sitting talking to me in his delightfully lazy way, quite undisturbed by any one else in the room. He has exactly grandmamma's manner of finding a general company simply furniture.

He was just telling an amusing story of the house in Scotland he had come from, when an explosion happened at the other side of the fire-place. Loud coughing and choking, mixed with a great clatter of teaspoons and china—and, amid a terrified silence, the fog-horn exclaimed:

"Surely, Mrs. Gussie, I told you plain enough that sugar in my tea makes me sick."

I apologized as well as I could, and repaired my want of attention, and then I felt my other guests must claim me, so I whispered to Antony:

"Do go and talk to Lady Wakely, please. You are preventing me from doing my duty! I am listening to you instead."

"Virtuous Comtesse!"

But he rose, and crossed over to the fat wife of the member for this division, and soon her face beamed with smiles.

I soothed Mr. McCormack, who somehow felt the sugar had been his fault.

Augustus mollified the fog-horn Dodd, and peace was restored all around.

It is a long time between tea and dinner when the days

are growing short. It was only half-past six when every excuse for lingering over the teacups had expired.

What on earth could one do with this ill-assorted company for a whole hour?

Augustus, with a desire to be extremely smart, had commanded dinner at half-past eight.

Mercifully, the decent people and some of the men played bridge, and were soon engaged at one or two tables. Augustus, who is growing fond of the game, made one of the fourth, thus leaving five of our guests hanging upon my hands.

"Shall I show you your rooms? Perhaps you would like to rest before dinner," I said to the ladies, who were good enough to assent, with the exception of Mrs. Dodd, who snorted at the idea of resting.

"Wullie," she said to Mr. Dodd. She had evidently picked up the Scotch pronunciation of his name from him, a quiet, red-haired man originally from Glasgow. He was hovering in the direction of one of the bridge-tables. "Wullie, don't let me see you playing that game of cards. There are letters to be written to Martha and my mother. Come with me," she commanded.

Mr. Dodd obeyed, and they retired to the library together.

They are evidently quite at home here, and did not need any attention from me.

Antony Thornhirst was the only other guest unemployed, and he immediately rose and went to write letters in the hall, he said. He had refused to play bridge on account of this important correspondence.

So at last I got the two women off to their rooms, and was standing irresolutely for a second, glancing over the balustrade after closing the last door, when my kinsman looked up.

"Comtesse," he called, softly, "won't you come down and tell me when the post goes?"

I descended the stairs. He was standing at the bottom by one of the negro figures when I reached the last step.

"Have you not some quiet corner where we might sit and talk of our ancestors?" he asked, with a comic look in his cat's eyes. "This place is so draughty, and I am afraid of the bears! And we should disturb that loving couple in the library and the bridge-players in the drawing-room. Have you no suggestions for my comfort? I am one of your guests, too, you know!"

"There is Mrs. Gurrage's boudoir, that has straight-up, padded chairs and crimson satin, and there is my own, that is mustard yellow. Which could you bear best before dinner?" I said, laughing.

"Oh! the yellow—mustard is stimulating and will give me an appetite."

So we walked up the stairs again together and he followed me down the thickly carpeted passage to my highly gilded shrine.

For the first time since I have owned it, I felt sorry I had been too numb to make it nice. The house-maids arrange it in the morning, and there it stays, a monument of the English upholsterer's idea of a Louis XV. boudoir.

As I told Hephzibah, the little copy of La Rouchefoucauld and the miniature of Ambrosine Eustasie are the only things of mine—my own—that are here, besides all my new books, of course.

I sat down in the straight-backed sofa. It has terra-cotta and buff tulips running over the mustard brocade. The gilt part runs into your back.

Antony sat at the other end.

A very fat, rich cushion of "school of art" embroidery, with frills, fell between us. We looked up at the

same moment and our eyes met, and we both laughed.

"You remind me of a picture I bought last year," Antony said. "It was a little pastel by La Tour, and the last owner had framed it in a brand-new, brilliant gilt Florentine frame."

Suddenly, as he spoke, a sense of shame came over me. I felt how wrong I had been to laugh with him about this—my home. It is because, after all these months, I cannot realize that Ledstone is my home that I have been capable of committing this bad taste.

I felt my cheeks getting red and I looked down.

"I—I like bright colors," I said, defiantly. "They are cheerful and—and——"

"Sweet Comtesse!" interrupted Antony, in his mocking tone, which does not anger me. "Tell me about your books."

He got up lazily, and began reading the titles of a heap on the table beyond.

"What strange books for a little girl! Who on earth recommended you these?"

"No one. I knew nothing at all about modern books, so I just sent for all and any I saw in the advertisements in the papers. Most of them are great rubbish, it seems to me, but there are one or two I like."

He did not speak for a few moments.

"All on philosophy! You ought to read novels at your age."

"I did get some in the beginning, but they seemed all untrue and mawkish, or sad and dramatic, and the heroines did such silly things, and the men were mostly brutes, so I have given them up. Unless I see the advertisement of a thrilling burglary or mystery story, I read those. They are not true, either, and one knows it, but they make one forget when it rains."

"All women profess to have a little taste for philosophy and beautifully bound Marcus Aureliuses, and *Maximes,* and love poems—clever little scraps covered in exquisite bindings. And one out of a thousand understands what the letter-press is about. I am weary of seeing the same on every boudoir-table, and yet some of them are delightful books in themselves. You have none of these, I see."

He picked up the La Rochefoucauld.

"Yes, here is one, but this is an old edition." He turned to the title-leaf and read the date, then looked at the cover. It is bound in brown leather and has the same arms and coronet upon it that my chatelaine has—the arms of Ambrosine Eustasie de Calincourt and an "A. E. de C." entwined, all tooled in faded gold.

"The arms on my knife!" Antony said, pulling it from his waistcoat-pocket and comparing them.

"My knife," I said.

"Tell me all about her—A. E. de C.," he commanded, seating himself on the sofa again.

"She was my great-great-grandmother, and was guillotined. See—I will show you her miniature," and I took it from its case on the writing-table. I have had a leather covering made to keep safe the old paste frame. It has doors that shut, and I don't let her look too much at the mustard-yellow walls, my pretty ancestress.

"What an extraordinary likeness!" Antony exclaimed, as he looked at it. "Are you sure I am not dreaming and you are not your own great-great-grandmother?"

"No, I am myself. But I am supposed to be like her, though."

"It is the very image of you. She has your air and carriage of the head, and—and—" he looked at it very carefully under the electric light which sprouts from a

twisted bunch of brass lilies on the wall, their stalks suggesting a modern Louis XV. nightmare.

"And what?"

"Well, never mind. Now I want to hear her story." And we both sat down again for the third time on the tulip-sofa.

I told him the history just as I had told him the outline of my life the day in the Harley woods. Only, as then I felt I was speaking of another person, now I seemed to be talking of myself when I came to the part of walking up the guillotine steps.

"And so they cut her head off—poor little lady!" said Antony, when I had finished, and he looked straight into my eyes.

The pillow of art-needlework and frills had fallen to the floor—even it could not remain comfortably on the hard seat! There was nothing between us on the sofa.

Antony leaned forward, close to me. His voice was strangely moved.

"Comtesse!" he began, when McGreggor knocked at the door.

"Mr. Gurrage is calling you, ma'am," she said, in her heavy, Scotch voice, "and he seems in a hurry, ma'am."

"Ambrosine!" echoed impatiently in the hall.

"Why, it must be dressing-time!" said Antony, calmly, looking at his watch. "I must not keep you," and he quietly left the room as Augustus burst in from my bedroom door.

"Where on earth have you been?" he said, crossly. "That Dodd woman has been driving us all mad! Willie Dodd came and joined us at bridge and took McCormack's place, and the old she-tike came after him and chattered like a monkey until she got him away. Where were you that you did not look after her?"

"I was here, in my sitting-room, talking to Sir Antony Thornhirst," I said, almost laughing. The picture of Mrs. Dodd at the bridge-table amused me to think of. Augustus saw me smiling, and he looked less ruffled.

"She is an old wretch," he said. "I wish I had not to ask Willie Dodd every year, but business is business, and I'll trouble you to be civil to them. We will weed out the whole of this lot, gradually, now. The mater will go off to Bournemouth at this time of the year, and so, by-and-by, we can have nothing but smart people."

The evening passed in an endless, boring round. This sort of company does not adapt itself as the people at Harley did. With my best endeavors to be a good hostess, the uneasiness of my guests prevented me from making them feel comfortable or at home.

Mrs. Dodd's impertinence would have been insupportable if it had not been so funny.

She complained of most things—the draughts, the inconvenience of the hours of the train departures, and so on.

She was gorgeously dressed and hung with diamonds. Without being exceptionally stout, everything is so tight and pushed-up that she seems to come straight out from her chin in a kind of platform, where the diamonds lose themselves in a narrow, perpendicular depression in the middle.

Antony sat next me at dinner, at one side; on the other was old Sir Samuel Wakely. Mr. Dodd on his left hand had Miss Springle, the playful, giddy daughter of one of the guns.

She chaffed him all the time, much to the annoyance of his life's partner, who was sitting opposite, and who, owing to an erection of flowers, was unable to quite see what was going on.

"Yes," we heard Mr. Dodd say, at last, "I nearly bought it in Paris at the Exhibition. Eh! but it was a beautiful statue!"

"I like statues," said Miss Springle.

"Well, she was just a perfect specimen of a woman, but Missus Dodd wouldna let me purchase her, because the puir thing wasna dressed. I didna think it could matter in marble."

"What's that you are saying about Mrs. Dodd?" demanded that lady from across the table, dodging the chrysanthemums.

"I was telling Miss Springle, my dear, of the statue of 'Innocence' I wanted to buy at the Exhibition at Paris," replied Mr. Dodd, meekly, "and that you wouldna let me on account of the scanty clothing."

"Innocence, indeed!" snorted Mrs. Dodd. "Pretty names they give things over there! And her clothing scant, you call it, Wullie? Why, you are stretching a point to the verge of untruth to call it clothing at all—a scarf of muslin and a couple of doves! Anyhow, I'll have it known I'll not have a naked woman in my drawing-room, in marble or flesh!"

The conversation of the whole table was paralyzed by her voice. My eye caught Antony's, and we both laughed.

"There, there, my dear, don't be even suggesting such things," said Mr. Dodd, soothingly.

"La! Mrs. Dodd, you make me blush," giggled Miss Springle.

I wondered what Antony thought of it all, and whether he had ever been among such people before. His face betrayed nothing after he laughed with me, and he seemed to be quietly enjoying his dinner, which, fortunately, was good.

It was only for a few minutes before we all said good-night that we spoke together alone.

"Shall you be down to breakfast, Comtesse?" he asked me.

"Oh yes," I said. "These people would never understand. They would think I was being deliberately rude if I breakfasted in my room."

"At nine o'clock, then?"

"Yes."

"Lend me your La Rochefoucauld to read to-night?" he asked.

"With pleasure. I will have it sent to your room."

"No, let me get it from your mustard boudoir myself. I shall be coming up, probably, to change into a smoking-coat, and my room is down that way, you know."

"Very well."

So we said good-night.

Half an hour afterwards, I was standing by my sitting-room fire when Antony came into the room. He leaned on the mantelpiece beside me and looked down into my face.

"When will you come over to Dane Mount, Comtesse? I want to show you *my* great-great-grandmother. She was yours, too, by-the-way," he said.

"When will you ask us?"

"In about a fortnight. I have to run about Norfolk until then. Will you come some time near the 4th of November?"

"I shall have to ask Augustus, but I dare say we can."

He frowned slightly at the mention of Augustus.

"Of course. Well, I will not have a party, only some one to talk to—your husband. The ancestors won't interest him, probably."

"Oh! Do ask Lady Tilchester," I said. "I love her."

He bent down suddenly to look at the Dresden clock.

"No, I don't think so. She will be entertaining herself just then," he said, "and probably could not get away. But leave it to me. I promise to arrange that Augustus shall not be bored."

He picked up La Rochefoucauld and opened it.

"I see you have marked some of the *maximes*."

"No. Grandmamma and the Marquis must have done that. Look, they are all of the most witty and cynical that are pencilled. I can hear them talking when I read them. That is just how they spoke to one another."

He read aloud:

"*'C'est une grande folie de vouloir être sage tout seul!'* Don't be *'sage tout seul,'* Comtesse. Let me keep you company in your *sagesse,*" he said.

I looked up at him. His eyes were full of a quizzical smile. There is something in the way his head is set, a distinction, an air of command. It infinitely pleases me. I felt—I know not what!

"Now I will say good-night. I am tired, and it is getting late," I said.

"Good-night, Comtesse," and he walked to the door. "I shall be down at nine o'clock."

And so we parted.

CHAPTER VIII

On the morrow it had cleared up and flashes of blue sky were appearing. Augustus and Mr. McCormack had both had too much to drink the night before, at dinner, and were looking, and no doubt feeling, mixed and ill-tempered.

The morning was long after the shooters had gone. It seemed as if one o'clock, when we were to start for the lunch, would never come.

Miss Springle had some passages-at-arms with Mrs. Dodd. They had all been down to breakfast but Lady Wakely and another woman, who were accustomed to the ways of the world.

I had never seen any shooting before. The whole thing was new to me. Augustus had insisted upon selecting what he considered a suitable costume for me. We had been up to London several times together to try it on, and, on the whole, though a little *outre* in its checks, it is not unbecoming.

"Do you shoot, yourself, Mrs. Gussie?" Mrs. Dodd asked, when we assembled in the hall, ready to start.

"No; do you?" I replied.

"Of course not! The idea! But, seeing your skirt so very short, I should have guessed you were a sports-woman and killed the birds yourself!" and she sniffed ominously.

"Do birds get killed with a skirt?" Miss Springle asked, pertly. She hates Mrs. Dodd. They were

neighbors in Liverpool, originally. "I thought you had to shoot at them?"

Mrs. Dodd snorted.

"You will get awfully muddy, Mrs. Dodd, in your long cashmere," Miss Springle continued. "And Mr. Dodd told me, when I met him coming from the bath this morning, to be sure not to wear any colors—they frighten the birds. I am certain he will object to that yellow paradise-plume in your hat."

Mrs. Dodd looked ready to fight.

"Mr. Dodd had better talk to me about my hat!" she said, growing purple in the face. "I call all these modern sporting-costumes indecent, and when I was a girl I should have been whipped for coming out shooting in the things you have got on, Miss Springle!"

"Really! you don't say so!" said Miss Springle, innocently. "Why, I never heard they shot birds in Liverpool, Mrs. Dodd."

I interfered. The expression of my elder guest's face was becoming apoplectic.

"Let us get into the brake," I said.

Lady Wakely sat next me.

"Very unpleasant person, Mrs. Dodd," she whispered, wheezily, as we drove off. "She is here every year. My dear, you are good-natured to put up with her."

Lunch was laid out in the barn of one of the farmhouses. Augustus had given orders that it should be of the most sumptuous description, and the chef had done marvels.

The table looked like a wedding-breakfast when we got there, with flowers and printed menus.

The sportsmen were not long in making their appearance. It was a rather warm day, and Mr. McCormack and Mr. Dodd, who were not accustomed to much ex-

ercise, I suppose, without ceremony mopped their heads.

Antony, who was walking behind, with Sir Samuel Wakely, appeared such an astonishingly cool contrast to them. His coat did not look new, but as if it had seen service. Only everything fitted and hung right, and he walks with an ease and grace that would have pleased grandmamma.

Augustus had a thunderous expression on his face. So had Wilks, the head keeper. Later, I gathered there had been a great quantity of birds, but the commercial friends had not been very successful in their destruction. In fact, Mr. Dodd had only secured two brace, besides getting one of the beaters in the shoulder, and a dog.

Antony sat by me.

"Dangerous work, shooting," he said, smiling, as he looked at the menu. "What is your average list of killed in a pheasant battue?"

"What—what kind of killed?" I asked, laughing.

"Guests or beaters or dogs—anything but the birds."

"Cutlets ha la ravigotte or 'ommard ha lamerican, Sir Antony?" the voice of the first footman sounded in our ears.

"Oh—er—get me a little Irish stew or some cold beef," said Antony, plaintively, still with the menu in his hand.

"We've no—Irish stew—except what is prepared for the beaters, Sir Antony," said James, apologetically. He had come from a ducal house and knew the world. "Shall I get you some of that, Sir Antony?"

"No, don't mind." Then, turning to me, "What are you eating, Comtesse?" he asked. "I will have some of that."

"It is truffled partridge in aspic," I said, disagreeably. "You can pick out the truffles if you are afraid of them."

"Truffled partridge, then," he said to James, resign-

edly, and when it came he deliberately ate the truffles first.

"Hock, claret, Burgundy, or champagne, Sir Antony?" demanded the butler.

"Oh—er—I will have the whole four!"

His face had the most comical expression of chastened resignation as he glanced at me.

Griggson poured out bumpers in the four glasses.

"I shall now shoot like your friend from Liverpool," said Antony, "and if I kill your husband and most of the guests I cannot be blamed for it," and he drank down the hock.

"Don't be so foolish," I said, laughing, in spite of having pretended to be annoyed with him.

"I would drink anything rather than incur your displeasure," he said, with great humility, as he took up the claret. "Must I eat everything on the menu, too?"

I appeared not to hear, and turned to Mr. Dodd, who was on my other side, his usually pale face still crimson with walking so fast and this feast of Lucullus he was partaking of.

"I had bad luck this morning, Mrs. Gussie," he said, in a humble voice. "I am sorry about that man and dog, and I am afraid the gentleman on your right must have got a pellet also—eh, sir?" and he addressed Antony.

"A mere trifle," said my neighbor on the right, with his most suave air and a twinkle in his eye as he finished the claret. "Just a shot or two in the left arm—a mere nothing, when one considers the dangers the whole line were incurring."

"You were shot in the arm, Sir Antony?" I exclaimed, suddenly, feeling a great dislike to Mr. Dodd. "Oh, but people should not shoot if they are so careless, surely!"

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Mr. Dodd, huffily. "I am not careless. I have been shooting now for a matter of five years and only twice before have hit any one."

"You have had the devil's own luck!" said Antony, beginning the Burgundy.

"You may call it luck, sir," said Mr. Dodd, "but I think a man wants a bit of judgment, too, to shoot, and I always try to remember where my neighbors stand. But, I must admit, with pheasant shooting in a wood it is more difficult. It was getting a little excited with a rabbit which caused the last accident I had."

Antony finished the Burgundy.

"Are you going to walk with us afterwards, Comtesse?" he asked me, presently, in a low voice, his eyes still twinkling; "because, if so, I advise you to fortify your nerve with a little orange brandy I see they are handing now," and he began the champagne.

"Oh, I am so sorry about the whole thing. I think it is perfectly dreadful," I said, "and—and I do hope you are not really hurt."

He showed me his wrist. His silk shirt-sleeve was wet with blood, and his arm also had streaks on it, and just under the skin were two or three small, black lumps.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am," I said, and my voice trembled. I felt I wanted to take his arm and wash the blood off, and caress it, and tell him how it grieved me that he should be wounded—and by these people, too. I would like to have shot them all.

"Don't look so distressed, Comtesse," he said. "It does not hurt a bit, and the whole thing amuses me. A very original character, Mr. Dodd," and he finished the champagne.

Augustus walked with me after lunch for a little when

we started. He was in a furious temper at the non-slaughter of the partridges.

"By Jove! next year," he said, "I'll clear out the whole boiling, whether the mater likes it or no, and have some of the people we met at Harley. Thornhirst is the only man who has killed anything great, though Wakely and Bush did a fair share."

I told him how dreadful I thought the accident had been.

"Good thing it was not me he shot," said Augustus. "I'd have fired back. But the part I mind the most is the miserable bag. Wilks is mad. We both wanted the record to go to the field; and what can we do? Only thirty-two brace up to luncheon!"

I soothed him as well as I could.

Mrs. Dodd was puffing behind us. She had insisted upon following with the guns, although Lady Wakely and the two other elderly women had driven back to Ledstone.

The yellow paradise plume and bright-blue dress made a glowing spot of color on the brown, ploughed field.

Miss Springle tripped gayly along in front with Mr. Dodd, coquettishly tapping him on the arm and looking up in his face.

Giggles of laughter were wafted back to us. Miss Springle is a rather pretty girl, with thick, black hair.

Antony strode forward and joined us. Augustus dropped behind to speak to Wilks.

"You must stand with me," Antony said. "I will protect you as well as I can, and the chances are against the shot coming my way twice in one day."

He was so gay. Never have I had so delightful a walk. I cannot write down what he said. If I try to remember his words, I cannot. It is the general im-

pression they leave behind, rather than any actual sentence I can recall, which makes me feel his wit is like grandmamma's, and it reveals all the time his great knowledge of books, and people, and the world. And there is a lightness which makes one feel how strong and deep must be the under-current.

My spirits always rise when I am with him.

Soon we arrived at the hedge we were to stand behind.

It was all new to me, the whole scene. Out of nowhere Antony's servant seemed to spring with two guns and a stick-seat, which he arranged for me.

Mrs. Dodd had panted after her husband and Miss Springle, who were in the most open place; but Wilks was unable to contain himself with annoyance at this.

"Not a bird will face the line if the lady's dress is seen," he said, in despair, as he passed us, and we saw him unceremoniously insist upon Mrs. Dodd joining Sir Samuel Wakely, who was at the thickest corner, next us.

"The air must be black with the language Wakely is using, I will bet," said Antony.

And then the partridges began to come.

"There's a burrd! There's a burrd!" shouted Mr. Dodd, excitedly, pointing with his gun straight at Sir Samuel's head.

"Damn you, sir!" yelled Sir Samuel back to him. "It is pure murder the way you hold your gun."

"I'll trouble you not to swear at my husband!" roared Mrs. Dodd.

A huge covey came over at the moment, but the voices and the bright-blue dress attracted their attention, and they all wheeled off to the right, so that, but for two stray birds killed by Antony, this end of the line found the drive a blank.

Augustus's rage knew no bounds.

He came up to me as if it was my fault.

"Take that old woman home this moment, Ambrosine," he said, furiously. "Do you hear?—this minute!" and I was obliged to go up to Mrs. Dodd and suggest our returning. I was tired, I said.

"I'll not leave Wullie with that minx," she replied, firmly. "You can go without me, Mrs. Gussie. I'll not take it rude of you at all." I tried to explain that I thought we were all a little in the way and had better return to the house; but Miss Springle, who joined us, would not hear of such a thing.

"Mr. Dodd says he can't get on without me," she said, coyly, whereupon Mrs. Dodd gurgled with rage.

"I am afraid you will all be shot if you delay here," said Antony, coming to my rescue. "We are going to take the next beat at right angles and you are all in the full line."

"Goodness, gracious me!" screamed Mrs. Dodd. "Oh, gentlemen, save me!"

And she rushed wildly towards Augustus, who was coming up, her dress held high, showing a pair of opulent ankles and wide, flat feet covered in thin, kid boots, while a white cotton stocking appeared upon the stove-pipe calf that was visible above.

The yellow paradise plume floated in the wind, the hat having become a little deranged by her rapid flight.

"Gussie Gurrage!" she yelled. "Oh, do you hear that? The gentleman says I'll be shot!"

And she precipitated herself into the unwilling arms of Augustus.

He has not manners enough to stand such an assault. His face flushed with annoyance, and the savage look grew round his mouth. I waited for the explosion.

"Confound it, Mrs. Dodd!" he said. "Women have no business out shooting, and you had better clear out and go home."

"I've never been so insulted in my life!" she snorted.

I remained in haughty silence. I feared I should burst into screams of laughter if I attempted speech.

Miss Springle had evaded us at the last minute, and could be seen once more by Mr. Dodd's side as we drove past the shooters again on the road.

A meek woman, sister of Mr. McCormack, a Mrs. Broun by name, who had quietly stood by her husband and had not been in any one's way, now caught Mrs. Dodd's wrath.

"You've had a good deal to do with Jessie Springle's bringing up, I've heard, Mrs. Broun, since her mother died, and a disgrace she is to you, I can testify."

"Oh, dear Mrs. Dodd, how can you say such a thing?" said Mrs. Broun, almost crying. "Jessie is a dear girl, so full of fun."

"Fun, you call it, Mrs. Broun! Looking after other women's husbands! How would you like her to be flirting with your Tom?"

"Oh, it is quite immodest, talking so, Mrs. Dodd!" replied the meek lady, flushing scarlet. "Why, no one would ever think of such things—a girl to flirt with a married man!"

"That's all you know about it, Mrs. Broun. I tell you that girl will upset your home yet! Mark my words; but I'll not have her running after Wullie, anyway."

The situation was becoming very strained. I felt bound to interfere by some banal remarks about the scenery, and finally we arrived back at Ledstone and I got rid of them by conducting them to their rooms.

CHAPTER IX

It poured rain again before the sportsmen returned, and they were more or less wet and cross. Antony went straight to his room to change, and so did the two other decent men. But the commercial friends stayed as they were, muddy boots and all, and were grouped round the fire, smelling of wet, hot tweed, when Mrs. Dodd sailed into the room.

"Wullie," she said, sternly, "you've no more sense than a child, and if it was not for me you'd have been in your coffin these five years. Go up-stairs this minute and change your boots." And off she sent him, but not without a parting shot from Miss Springle.

"Mind you put on a blue velvet smoking-suit, Mr. Dodd, dear. I do love gentlemen in smoking-suits," she said, giggling.

Tea was a terrible function. Oh, the difference to the merry tea at Harley!

Lady Wakely, sleepily knitting and addressing an occasional observation to her neighbor; the rest of the women silent as the grave, except Miss Springle and Mrs. Dodd, who sparred together like two cats.

The men could talk of nothing but the war news which had come by the afternoon post.

There was gloom over the whole party. How on earth was I to escape from the oppression? They were not people of the world, who would be accustomed to each person doing what they pleased. They expected to be entertained all the time. To get away from them for

a moment I would be obliged to invent some elaborate excuse.

Antony had not appeared upon the scene, or Augustus, either.

At last—at last Lady Wakely put her knitting in a bag and made a move towards the door.

"I shall rest now," she said, in her fat, kind voice, and I accompanied her from the room, leaving the rest of my guests to take care of themselves. I felt I should throw the cups at their heads if I stayed any longer.

There, in the hall, was Antony, quietly reading the papers. His dark-blue and black silk smoking-suit was extraordinarily becoming. He looked like a person from another planet after the people I had left in the drawing-room.

He rose as we passed him.

"Some very interesting South African news," he said, addressing me, and while I stopped to answer him Lady Wakely went up the stairs alone.

"The draughts are dreadful here again, Comtesse," he said, plaintively.

"Why did you not go into the library, then," I said, "or the billiard-room, or one of the drawing-rooms?"

"I thought perhaps you might pass this way and would give me your advice as to which room to choose."

I laughed. "The library, then, I suggest," and I started as if to go up the stairs.

"Comtesse! You would not leave me all alone, would you? You have not told me half enough about our ancestors yet."

"Oh, I am tired of the ancestors!" and I mounted one step and looked back.

"I thought perhaps you would help me to tie up my wrist."

I came down instantly. If he were pretending, I would punish him later.

"Come," I said, and led the way to the library, where we found the fire had gone out.

How ashamed I felt of the servants! This must never happen again.

"Not here; it is cold and horrid." And he followed me on into my mother-in-law's boudoir. There were no lights and no fire.

My wrath rose.

"It must be your mustard sitting-room, after all," said Antony. So up the stairs we went. Here, at all events, the fire blazed, and the room glowed with brilliancy.

Roy was lying on the rug and seemed enchanted to see us.

"Is it really hurting you?" I said, hurriedly.

"No, not hurting—only a stupid little scratch." And he undid his shirt-cuff and turned up his sleeve.

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "Oh, I am so sorry!"

One of the shots had grazed the skin and made a nasty cut, which was plastered up with sticking-plaster and clumsily tied with a handkerchief.

"My servant is not a genius at this sort of thing. Will you do it better, Comtesse?"

I bound the handkerchief as neatly as I could, and, for some unexplained reason, as once before at Harley, my heart beat in my throat. I could feel his eyes watching me, although my head was bent.

I did not look up until the arm was finished. His shirt was of the finest fine. There was some subtle scent about his coat that pleased me. A faint perfume, as of very good cigars—nothing sweet and effeminate, like a woman. It intensely appealed to me. I felt—I felt—oh, I do not know at all what my feelings meant.

I tried to think of grandmamma, and how she would have told me to behave when I was nervous. I had never been so nervous in my life before.

"You—you will not shoot to-morrow?" I faltered.

"Of course I shall. You must not trouble about this at all, Comtesse. It is the merest scratch, and was a pure accident. He is an excellent fellow, Mr.—er—Dodd is name, is it not? Only pity is he did not shoot his wife, poor fellow!"

Again, as on a former occasion, the admirable *sang-froid* of my kinsman carried things smoothly along. I felt quite calmed when I looked up at him.

"We won't try sitting on that sofa to-night," I laughed. "This is a fairly comfortable arm-chair. You are an invalid. You must sit in it. See, I shall sit here," and I drew a low seat of a dreadfully distorted Louis XV. and early Victorian mixed style that the upholsterer, when bringing the things, had described to me as a "sweet pretty lady's-chair."

Antony sat down. The light from the lily electric branches made the gray in his hair shine silver. He looked tired and not so mocking as usual.

"I have settled with your husband when you are to come to Dane Mount. He says the 4th of November will suit him."

"We shall drive over, I suppose?"

"Yes."

After that we neither of us spoke for a few moments.

"Did you read La Rochefoucauld last night?" I asked, presently.

"No."

"Well, why did you ask for it, then?"

"I had a very good reason."

One could never describe the expression of Antony's face. If one goes on saying "mocking," or "cynical," or "ironical," or "quizzical," it gives no impression of what it is. It is a mixture of all four, and yet laughing, and —and—tender, and *insouciant,* and gay. He is himself, and there could never be any one like him. One feels as if all common things must vanish and shrivel up before his style of wit.

One could think of him as finishing his game of chess calmly while the officers of the Terror waited to conduct him to the guillotine. He is exactly—oh, but exactly!—grandmamma's idea of a gentleman. I wish she had seen more of him.

There is nothing *poseur* or dramatic about him. He is quite simple, although he laughs at things all the time. I seem to have learned more of the world, and the tone of everything, just talking to him, than from all the books I have read lately. What would it be like if he were interested in anything intensely, if something moved him deeply, if he really cared?

As I sat there I thought of many things. An atmosphere of home had suddenly come into the room. I could almost believe I could hear grandmamma's voice.

"What are you thinking of so seriously, Comtesse?" he asked, lazily.

"I was wondering—"

"Well?"

"I was wondering if anything really mattered in life; if one could grow old and remain numb all the time; if things are real; if—oh, does anything matter? Tell me, you who know."

"Not many things. Later, you will regret some things you have not done—very few you have."

"I have been reading metaphysics lately, and, it seems, one could reason one's self into believing nothing is real. One of my books said the ancient Cynic philosophers doubted for the sake of investigation and the moderns investigate for the sake of doubting. What does it all mean?"

He began stroking Roy's ears. He had put his dear black-and-tan head on Antony's knee.

"It means a great many words. Do not trouble your wise head about it. The world is a pleasant enough place if you can pay your bills and have a fair digestion—eh, Roy? Bones are good things, aren't they, old fellow?"

"You, at all events, are never serious," and I laughed.

"I will tell you about that when you come to Dane Mount."

"I wish you could have got Lady Tilchester to go, then. I do like her so much. She has been very kind to me. It would give me pleasure to see her."

"She is a delightful woman."

"She told me how long she had known you—since her wedding-day, I think she said—and, oh, lots of things about you. She seemed——"

He moved his arm suddenly.

"I don't think you tied this handkerchief tight enough, Comtesse," he said, again turning up his cuff.

I rose and looked at the bandage.

"Why, yes. It is just the same as it was. But I will do it again if you wish."

This time it did not take me so long, but that ridiculous beating began again in my heart.

"It must have a double knot to keep it right," said Antony.

My fingers seemed clumsy. We were standing so close together that there was a something—electricity—

which made my hands tremble. Oh, this was folly! I *must* not let myself feel so. I finished the knot at last, and then said, stupidly:

"I have an idea I should return to my worthy guests down-stairs."

Antony smiled.

"They are quite happy without you," he said. "Vain little Comtesse, to think your presence is necessary to every one!"

"I dare say. But—I must go to them."

"No, you must not. Sit down in your low chair and forget all about them. No good hostess fusses after her guests. People like to be left to themselves."

I sat down meekly.

"I never can understand," said Antony, presently, "why your grandmother did not let me know when first you came to the cottage. She was fully aware of the relationship between us, even if I was not."

"Grandmamma was a very proud woman. We were so very poor. And then, there was grandpapa's *bêtise*, which, I fancy, had quite separated them from his family."

"What made her come to Ledstone at all, I wonder?"

I felt my cheeks getting pink, and bent down to look into the fire.

"She wanted to live in England, so that I might become English by growing up there, and—and it was cheap. We had been in London before that, and back in Paris, and down at Brighton, and a lot of dull places. I remember she saw the advertisement in the paper one morning and took the cottage immediately."

"You had heard that we were relations?" he asked.

"Yes, vaguely. But I did not know how many of you there were, only that the present holder of the title was a Sir Antony."

"It was a strange coincidence neither of us should have caught the other's name at the ball that night."

"Yes."

"Afterwards, when we talked you over at Harley, every one had got information about you, it seemed. They were all so awfully interested in you. You looked such an extraordinary contrast to the rest of the company."

"Well, I am glad of that."

He smiled.

"It was when I heard that your grandmother was a Frenchwoman I grasped everything. I remembered there was some story in the family about a younger son marrying a beautiful Parisienne. But it seemed to me it must be too far back to be possible. And then Lady Tilchester told me she was a very old woman. So we came over next day."

"I wish you had seen more of grandmamma," I said. "You would have got on together. She used to say wonderful things sometimes."

"I thought her the most lovely old lady I had ever seen."

"Her maxims would fill a book as big as La Rochefoucauld."

"What a pity you did not write them down!"

"The Marquis and she had the *religion du beau*. They worshipped everything that was beautiful and suitable and refined. They never did anything for effect, only because the action was due to themselves and was a good action." I paused.

"Go on, Comtesse," said Antony. "I like to hear it all."

"They really believed in *noblesse oblige*. Neither of them would have stooped from their position—oh, not a little inch."

"It is a thing we have quite forgotten in England. It was inconvenient, and most of us are not rich enough to indulge in it."

"But must one be rich to behave as of one's race?" I asked, astonished.

"Yes—or remain in the background, a good deal bored. To obtain the wherewithal to enjoy this rather expensive world, people stoop considerably nowadays."

"And you don't think it dreadful?"

"I am not a Crusader. Times have changed. One can keep one's own ideas and let others do as they please."

"Grandmamma had a maxim like that. She said it was *bourgeois* to be shocked and astonished at things. She believed in the difference of classes. No one could have persuaded her that the common people are made of the same flesh and blood as we are."

"Tell me some more."

"This was her idea of things generally: first of all, to have the greatest self-respect; to stoop to no meanness; to desecrate the body or mind in no way; to conquer and overcome all foolish emotions; to be unselfish, to be gay, to be courageous; to bear physical and moral pain without any outward show; to have forever in front of one that a straight and beautiful carriage must be the reflection of a straight and beautiful mind; to take pleasure in simple things, and to be contented with what one has got if it is impossible to obtain better—in short, never to run one's head against a stone wall or a feather-bed, but if a good thing is to be gained by patience, or perseverance, or concentration, to obtain it."

"I am learning. Continue," said Antony, but there was no mock in his eyes. Only he smiled a little.

"They both had a fine contempt of death and a manner of *grand seigneur* and a perfect philosophy. They had

the refinement of sentiment of the *ancien régime,* only they were much less coarse. And in the *ancien régime* one worshipped the King and the constitution of France, whereas grandmamma and the Marquis worshipped only *le beau* in everything, which is higher than an individual."

"How well you tell it! I shall have to reorganize my religion."

"You are laughing at me!"

"No, I am not. I am deeply interested. Go on," and he leaned back in the straight-backed arm-chair.

"'Never stay in the mud,' was another of grandmamma's maxims. 'It happens that the best of us may fall there in life, but no one need stay there,' she used to say. Even the common people could rise out of it if they had a fine enough spirit. But we were the examples, and one must never give a bad example. For instance, the common people might cry when they were hurt. They were only lower creatures and under the protection of the others. They could roar, if it pleased them, as they were the model of no one. But we could not cry, to encourage this foolishness."

"And so you lived and learned all that, dear little Comtesse! No wonder your eyes are so wise."

"I remember once I became impatient with some new stitches in my embroidery that would not go right, and I flung the piece down and stamped on it and tore it. Grandmamma said nothing, but she deliberately undid a ball of silk and tangled it dreadfully, and then gave it to me to straighten out. It was not to irritate me, she said. But patience and discipline were necessary to enable one to get through life with decency and pleasure, and while I untangled the silk I should have time to reflect upon how comically ridiculous I had been to throw down and

trample upon an inanimate thing that only my personal stupidity had caused to annoy me."

Antony looked at me a long time. He sighed a short, quick sigh, and then said, gayly:

"You must certainly write a book for the training of the young. But what did your grandmother say of such things as strong passions—the mad love of one person for another, for instance? Could they be ruled by maxims?"

"She did not discuss those things with me. But she did say that in life, now and then, there came a *coup de foudre,* which sometimes was its glory and sometimes not; that this was nature, and there was no use going absolutely contrary to nature; but that a disciplined person was less likely to commit a *bêtise,* or to mistake a passing light for the *coup de foudre,* than one who was accustomed to give way to every emotion, as a trained soldier is better able to stand fire than the raw recruit from the fields."

"And yet the trained soldier goes under sometimes."

"In that case, she said, there were only two courses—either to finish the matter and go out altogether, or to get up again and fight better next time."

Antony looked down at me. He shaded his eyes with his hand, and it seemed as if he were observing something in my very soul. Then he said, with a whimsical smile.

"Comtesse, tell me. And did she consider there were any great sins?"

"Oh, yes. To break one's word, or in any way degrade one's race. But she said sins were not so much sins in themselves as in their *façon de faire.* One must remain a gentlewoman—or man—always, even in mo-

ments of the greatest *tourbillons*. 'We are all of flesh and blood,' she said, 'but in the same situation the *fille de chambre* conducts herself differently to the *femme de qualité*.' What a serious impression I am giving you of grandmamma, though! She was a gay person, full of pleasant thoughts."

"She permitted pleasures, then?"

"But, of course, all pleasures that did not really injure other people. She said custom and convention had robbed the world of much joy."

"She was quite right."

"She liked people to have fine perceptions. To be able to 'see with the eye lashes' was one of her expressions, and, I assure you, nothing escaped her. It was very fatiguing to be long in the company of people who passed their lives morally eating suet-pudding, she said. Avoid stodge, she told me, and, above all, I was to avoid that sentimental, mawkish, dismal point of view that dramatically wrote up, over everything, 'Duty,' with a huge D. It happened that there were duties to be done in life, but they must be accomplished quietly, or gayly, as the case might be."

We were both silent for some time after this. Then Antony exerted himself to amuse me. We talked as lightly as the skimming of swallows, flying from one subject to another. It seemed but a few minutes when the clock struck eight.

"You will make me late for dinner!" I exclaimed. "But you reminded me of grandmamma and the Marquis and made me talk."

"May I come again to-night—to return La Rochefoucauld?" he asked, with his droll smile.

"I do not know. We shall see." And I ran into my room, leaving him standing beside the fire.

CHAPTER X

When I got into my bedroom the door was open into Augustus's room beyond. He had not come up to dress. Indeed, when I was quite ready to go down to dinner he had not yet appeared.

Half-past eight sounded.

I descended the stairs quickly and went along the passage towards his "den." There I met his valet.

"Mr. Gurrage is asleep, ma'am," he said, "and does not seem inclined to wake, ma'am," and he held the door open for me to pass into the room.

Augustus was lying in his big chair, before the fire, his face crimson, his mouth wide open, and snoring and breathing very heavily. He was still in his shooting-things.

An indescribable smell of scorching tweed and spirit pervaded the room.

By his side was an almost finished glass of whiskey. The bottle stood on the tray and another bottle lay, broken, on the floor.

Atkinson began clearing up this *débris*.

"Augustus!" I called, but he did not awake. "Augustus, it is time for dinner!"

"If you please, ma'am," said the valet, coughing respectfully, "if I might say so, you had better let Mr. Gurrage sleep, ma'am. I'll see after him. He is—very angry when he is like this and woke suddenly, ma'am."

I looked at the whiskey bottles and the flushed face.

A sickening disgust overwhelmed me. And there would be no Lady Tilchester to save me to-night!

"Open the window," I said to Atkinson, "and persuade Mr. Gurrage to go to bed when he wakes." And I left the room.

All my guests were assembled when I got into the first drawing-room. Indeed, it was twenty minutes to nine.

Mrs. Dodd had the air of an aggrieved turkey-gobbler. I felt she would fly at some one.

"We thought we should not get any dinner, Mrs. Gussie," she said, huffily. "Folks are generally down in their own houses!"

I took no notice of this remark.

"I am so sorry to be late, Lady Wakely," I said, addressing her and the other women, "but my husband is not well, and, I fear, will not be able to come in to dinner. He must have caught a chill out shooting."

"Have you sent for the doctor? Because, if not, I know all about chills with Wullie, who never changes his socks," interrupted Mrs. Dodd. "Let me go to him, Mrs. Gussie."

"No, thank you. Do not trouble," I said. "His servant and I have done all that is necessary, and he wishes to sleep. Let us go in to dinner."

I told them each whom they were to take in, and put my own hand on Antony's arm. It seemed as if he held it closely to his side, but he said nothing, and we walked into the dining-room.

I do not know at all what we talked about. Certainly for three courses everything was a blank to me. But I heard myself laughing, and Mr. Dodd, who sat on my other hand, seemed mightily amused at my conversation.

"Why, the open air and a little walking has done you all the good in the world, Mrs. Gussie!" I was conscious, at last, that he was saying. "Your cheeks are quite rosy and your eyes as bright as stars."

"Yes, it was a delightful day," I said.

"Talk about chills, Mr. McCormack"—Mrs. Dodd's voice carried across the table—"I know Gussie Gurrage, and I don't believe he ever had a chill in his life!"

Antony now began to talk to me quietly. He said very little. His voice was particularly cool and collected. He never once looked at me. I was grateful for that. I felt as if I could not bear to see sympathy in his eyes. He also talked to Lady Wakely, on his other hand, and chaffed beyond to Miss Springle.

And so the dinner passed, and the ladies rose to leave the dining-room, Mr. McCormack holding the door for us.

As it was wide open, and all could see into the hall, an apparition appeared upon the scene, coming from the passage that leads to the "den"—Augustus, being supported by Atkinson and one of the footmen, and singing snatches of some low music-hall song.

In an instant Antony had sprung forward and closed the door, Mr. McCormack and the others standing open-mouthed and inert.

"There, I knew it was no chill!" exclaimed Mrs. Dodd.

"Hush, madam!" said Antony, sternly, his eyes flashing green-blue fire. "We were very comfortable at the table. Shall we not all sit down again?"

Lady Wakely at once returned to her chair. The meek Mrs. Broun put her hand on my arm in sympathy, but I annihilated her with a look as I swept back to my seat, and soon my guests were once more in their places.

Then it was that Antony exerted himself to amuse

this company. With the most admirable tact and self-composure, he kept the whole party entertained for half an hour. And when we again left the room it was *en bande,* without ceremony, the men accompanying us.

Lady Wakely kindly said good-night in quite a few minutes, and the other women followed her example. I spoke no word of thanks to Antony. I did not even look into his face.

When I got to my boudoir I could hear Augustus's drunken snores from the room beyond. He had mercifully fallen asleep.

I did not ring for McGreggor. I would stay in my sitting-room all night. Roy came up to me and licked my hand. Then suddenly something seemed to give way in my will, and I dropped on the rug beside my dog and cried as I have never cried in my life, my head buried in his soft, black coat.

Oh, grandmamma, forgive me for such weakness! But surely, if we had known of this horror, even the Calincourts need not have kept their word to a drunken man!

I did not hear the door open, but suddenly was conscious of Antony's voice.

"Ambrosine, for God's sake don't cry so!" he whispered, hoarsely.

I did not look up.

"Oh, I want to thank you for your kindness," I sobbed, "but if you would continue it you will leave me now."

He knelt on the rug beside me, but he did not even touch my hair.

"I cannot leave you—miserable like this," he said, brokenly, as if the words were dragged from him. "Am-

brosine, my dearest! Little Comtesse, please, please do not cry!"

Joy ran through me at his words. My sobs ceased.

The drunken voice of Augustus began the song again from the next room.

I started up in terror. Oh, if he should burst into this room!

"Antony," I implored, "if you want to serve me, go!" And I opened the passage door.

He drew me into the corridor with him.

"I tell you, you shall not stay here alone with that brute!" he said, fiercely. "Promise me you will go to your maid's room and not come into this part of the house to-night. I will see his valet and arrange things safely for him."

"Very well," I said, and then I ran. If I had stayed another moment—ah, well!

Augustus was too ill to get up next morning. It was raining again, and, by common consent, our guests left by mid-day trains.

Sir Samuel Wakely said, with gruff kindheartedness, when I appeared at breakfast:

"I have seen Wilks, and he says there is very little chance of its clearing for us to shoot to-day, so I think Lady Wakely and I will be starting home before luncheon-time. With your husband ill, I am sure you would be glad to be relieved of visitors."

Lady Wakely also expressed her regret at leaving, and said a number of kind things with perfect tact.

The good taste of some of the rest of the party was not so apparent. Mrs. Broun gushed open sympathy and had to be snubbed; Miss Springle giggled, while Mrs.

Dodd muttered a number of disagreeable things, and the other women remained in shocked silence.

The men were awkward and uncomfortable, too. Altogether it was a morning that is unpleasant to remember. Antony was the only person unmoved and exactly the same as usual. It steadied my nerves to look at him.

I had not seen Augustus, as I had come straight from a room near McGreggor's, where I had spent the night. As I was leaving the dining-room I went towards the staircase, but Antony stopped me.

"Do not go up," he said. "Leave him to himself. The doctor is with him, and when he has completely recovered he will probably be penitent. He has only just escaped delirium tremens, and will most likely be in bed for a day or two. Promise me that you will not go near his room or I will stay and look after you myself."

Oh, the kindness in his voice!

"Yes, I promise," I said, meekly.

"Then I will say good-bye, Comtesse, until we meet at Dane Mount on the 4th of November."

"Good-bye," I faltered, and we shook hands calmly before the rest of the company standing about the hall.

But when the tuff-tuff-tuff of his automobile subsided in the distance, I felt as if all things were dead.

The evening post brought an invitation from the Duke of Myrlshire, asking us to go and stay with him for a small shoot on the 30th of October.

Augustus sent for me.

As I had promised, I had not been near him until this moment.

He was still in bed, and looked ill and unshaven. He was reading his letters, and glanced up at me with heavy, bloodshot eyes.

"Just got a line from Myrlshire," he said, pompously, without a trace of shame or regret in his voice.

"He says he has written to you, too; he wants me to shoot on the 30th."

I remained silent. I did not mean to irritate him, but the whole scene made me numb with disgust.

"Why the devil don't you answer?" Augustus raged, his face flushing darkly. "Write at once and say we shall be delighted to accept."

"You are engaged to shoot with Mr. Dodd for that date," I informed him.

Mr. Dodd was sent to perdition, and Mrs. Dodd, too, and then he said, more quietly:

"Sit down now and write to the Duke. I would not miss this for anything."

I did not stir from where I stood.

"Listen, Augustus," I said. "I will not visit with you anywhere, and I will let every one know the reason, unless you swear, by whatever you hold sacred, that you will never utterly disgrace yourself again as you did last night. When you have decided to make this oath you can let me know." And I left the room, leaving the air behind me thick with curses.

I had one of the most distant spare rooms prepared for myself, and when I was going to bed a note came to me.

"I swear," it ran. "Only come back to me. I want to kiss you good-night."

"Tell Mr. Gurrage I will see him in the morning," I said to Atkinson, and I locked my door.

CHAPTER XI

Augustus was not able to leave his room for four or five days after this. I left him almost entirely to himself, only going to see him once a day, to hear if he required anything.

At the end of the time his penitence was complete, and he promised me to change his ways for the future. He was horribly affectionate to me, but peace was restored.

I cannot say that I felt any happier, but it seemed a lull and calm after a storm. I tried to be more gentle and sympathetic to him and to take more interest in the house.

And so, at last, the 30th arrived, and our visit to Myrlton Castle.

We had to pass through London on our way there, and Augustus left me for an hour or two, while he went to his tailor's, he said.

I had no money to shop with. I had spent all my first quarter's allowance on books and a late wedding-present to Hephzibah, and I foolishly could not bring myself to ask Augustus for more.

So I sat in the hotel hall after lunch and watched the people passing by.

What had seemed a great sum of money to me in my days of poverty now appeared a very meagre allowance, as I had begun to realize what things cost. In making the settlement I had not been consulted. Grandmamma and the Marquis had arranged matters with my future

husband, and I remember her words: "We have only been able to secure for your personal use a very mediocre sum, but your jointure in case of widowhood is quite magnificent."

Augustus had promised her I should have everything I wanted in the world—"as much money as she likes to ask for, once she is my wife."

It was the "asking for" that kept me penniless. I would not be so foolish as to spend it all at once the next time it came in. Meanwhile the knowledge that a sovereign or two is all one possesses in one's pocket has a depressing effect upon the spirits.

"Run up what bills you like for your clothes," Augustus had often said to me. "I don't care, as long as they show the money that has been put into them and you make a good dash."

So I sat on the sofa in the hotel hall musing all by myself.

Suddenly a desire came over me to take Augustus at his word. I, too, would go to my tailor's.

I do not know London very well; but Lady Tilchester had given me the address of the latest and most fashionable dressmaker, and I got into a hansom and drove there.

The garments were pretty, and I ordered several tea-gowns and things they had ready, and, as I was leaving, gave Augustus's name and address for the account to be sent to. He should receive the bill, as he wished.

I spoke distinctly, and perhaps more loudly than usual, as I find shop-people so stupid with names. A young *vendeuse,* who heard me as she entered the room, now came up.

"Oh, this is Madam Henriette's order, Madam Green," she said to the elder woman who had been attending upon me. "Madam Henriette is engaged just

now"—and she turned to me—"but she asked me to tell your ladyship if you should call again to-day that the things will be sent off to-night to join you at Myrlton Castle, as you wished. Mr. Gurrage has just been in and left a message that he was sorry to miss your ladyship, but would be at the station." Then, struck by some look in my face, she said, "The Viscountess Grenellen, is it not?"

The elder *vendeuse,* who probably knew Lady Grenellen by sight, was green with apprehension that some shocking gaff had been committed.

For one second I hesitated, then:

"The things I have ordered are for Lady Grenellen," I said, calmly. Mercifully we are about the same height. "You can send them with the others to Myrlton Castle."

And with a few casual words of admiration about a set of lingerie that was lying on the table, I sauntered out into the street.

I do not know exactly what I felt—a sense of insult, principally.

I did not hate Lady Grenellen, and I did not feel jealous about Augustus. But it all seemed so terribly low.

She, a gentlewoman who must have been brought up with every surrounding that could foster the sentiment of self-respect—she, the Duke of Myrlshire's cousin, not a *parvenue*—beautiful, charming, and young—to accept clothes from Augustus!

Oh! To take a lover for love, that one could understand and perhaps pardon. The Marquis was grandmamma's lover, but—but not a common person like Augustus—for clothes!

"Back to the Carlton, miss?" said the hansom man, breaking in upon my thoughts. Perhaps I looked undecided as I stood in the street.

I glanced at my watch. There would be just time to catch the train.

"Euston," I said, and I swung to the doors. Then, as I sat there, I realized that my knees were trembling.

At the station Augustus had already arrived, and, under pretence of seeing whether the servants and luggage were all there, he was scanning the platform anxiously for Lady Grenellen.

His face fell when he saw me. Perhaps he hoped she would have arrived first.

I could not prevent myself from speaking in a voice of extra coldness, although I tried hard to be natural. This was not the moment for recriminations. Augustus noticed it, and, as usual, began to bluster.

"What's up?" he asked, irritably. "You look as white as a ghost."

"I will get into the carriage," I said. "I am cold." And Atkinson and McGreggor arranged my cushion and rugs for me, Augustus uneasily watching the platform meanwhile.

Two of the men who had been at Harley passed, and, seeing me, came up and spoke. They were going to Myrlton, too, I found.

"Why don't you get in here?" I said, graciously, to the funny one they had called "Billy," and whose other name I had never grasped. "It is so dull to travel alone with one's husband."

He got in and sat opposite me. We talked merrily.

"Why don't you get in, Gurrage?" he said. "It is horribly cold with the door open."

Augustus is not clever under these circumstances. He has no *sang-froid*, and is inclined to become ill-tempered.

At the last moment, before the train started, Lady

Grenellen tore down the platform. Augustus rushed to meet her, and the guard slammed our door.

Whether they had got in somewhere else we should not know until we arrived at Rugby Junction, where we were to change onto a branch line. I used the whole force of my will to put the matter out of my head. I told myself the doings of Augustus were nothing to me, and henceforth should not concern me in any way.

At last I succeeded in being quite able to enjoy my companion's conversation.

At Rugby we had a quarter of an hour to wait. Nothing of the other couple was to be seen. Apparently they must have missed the train, after all.

A few moments before the branch train started a special dashed into the station, and out got Lady Grenellen and Augustus. She was looking most radiant and lovely, but Augustus had an expression of unease and self-consciousness as he greeted us.

"Was it not too provoking, just missing the train," Lady Grenellen said, laughing. "Mr. Gurrage insisted upon having a special. Such a mercy he was there, as I could not possibly have afforded one."

This was the first time she had acknowledged my existence. Mr. Billy chaffed Augustus, and we all got into a saloon carriage together. It had been engaged by the Duke, and four or five people were already seated in it. They appeared all to be friends of Lady Grenellen's, and she was soon the soul of the party, laughing and telling of her mishap about the train, her white teeth gleaming and her rouge-pink cheeks glowing like a peach. No one could be more attractive, and I ceased to blame Augustus I could understand a man, if this lovely creature looked at him with eyes of favor, giving up any one, or committing any folly, for her sake.

Apparently, for the moment, she had finished with Au-ıstus, for she snubbed him sharply once or twice, and nally retired with a beautiful young man into the com-artment beyond, kissing her hand to the rest as she went ırough the door.

"I am going to talk business with Luffy till we get to Tyrlton," she said.

A savage look stamped itself upon Augustus's face. Vould he vent his anger on her, presently, or should I e the recipient of it? Time would show.

Myrlton is a glorious place, hundreds and hundreds f years old, and full of traditions and ghosts, with a eal draw-bridge and huge baronial hall, with the raised art, where they ate above the salt in by-gone days, verything is rather shabby and stiffly arranged, and, ex-ept in the Duke's own special rooms, it looks as if no oman had been there for years.

The Duke is a perfect host. He seemed delighted to ee me, and soon let me know that his only interest in the arty was on account of my presence among them. I felt oothed and flattered.

Lady Grenellen was in tearing spirits.

"Berty, I have got her," she laughed, as she deliberately rew a chair, and divided the Duke and me, who were tting a little apart.

"She isn't at all bad, and I have asked her and her ınt to come here to-morrow," she continued. "I told em I was giving the party, and that they should be my ıests. The aunt knows what for, and I expect the girl, o. She has at least fifty thousand a year. But she is nerican. There was nothing in the English market h enough. A paltry ten thousand would be no use to u."

"Oh, Cordelia, I told you I would not have an Ameri-

can," said the Duke, reproachfully. "Think how jumpy they are, and I can't explain to her that I simply want her to stay at home and have lots of children and do the house up."

"Oh, yes, you can. She is from the West, and a country-girl, and, I assure you, those Americans are quite accustomed to make a bargain. You can settle everything of that sort with the aunt."

"Mercifully, Margaret Tilchester is arriving tomorrow, too," sighed the Duke. "She has such admirable judgment. I shall be able to rely upon her."

"Ungrateful boy!" laughed Lady Grenellen. "After the trouble I have taken to get her, too. Now I am going to have a sleep before dinner. By-bye." And she sauntered off, accompanied by the beautiful young man.

Augustus stood biting the ends of his stubbly mustache.

No one had to bother about what the other people were doing here. The guests did not sit round waiting to be entertained; they all seemed perfectly at home, and did what they pleased.

The party was not large, but quite delightfully composed. I felt I should enjoy my evening. Before going down to dinner, Augustus came into my room. He hoped, he said, that I had some jewels on.

My appearance pleased him. He came up and kissed me. I could not speak to him, as McGreggor was in the room, and afterwards it seemed too late. Should I leave the affair in silence? Oh, if I had some one to advise me!—Lady Tilchester, perhaps. And yet how, so soon after my marriage, could I say to her: "My husband pays for another woman's clothes, and is, I suppose, her lover. But beyond the insult of the case, the disgust and contempt it fills me with, I am not hurt a bit,

nd am only thankful for anything that keeps him away rom me." What would she think? Would she under- tand, because of Lord Tilchester and Babykins, or ould it, being so soon, shock her? I wish I knew. erhaps it is as my mother-in-law said, and I am not a esh-and-blood woman.

Early next day—they had come by the Scotch mail— ord and Lady Tilchester arrived with Babykins.

Most of the men were out shooting except the Duke and ne beautiful young man (his name is Lord Luffton), rho had stayed behind to take care of us, they said.

Lady Grenellen appeared just before lunch.

"I have ordered a brougham to meet the one-thirty rain, Berty," she said, "to bring my Americans up. hey will be here in a minute. Come into the hall with ne to receive them."

The Duke accompanied her reluctantly.

"It would be as well to know their name," he said, as e sauntered after her trailing skirts.

"Cadwallader—Miss Martina B. Cadwallader—that is ne aunt, and Miss Corrisande K. Trumpet—that is the iece," said Lady Grenellen, stalking ahead.

The windows of the long galler, where we were all tting looked onto the court-yard, and two flys passed ne angle of the turret.

"Look at the luggage!" exclaimed Babykins, and we all ent to the window.

There was, indeed, a wonderful collection—both flys den with enormous, iron-bound trunks as big as hen- ouses. A pair of smart French maids seemed buried eneath them.

The entire party of us burned with curiosity to see ne owners, but long before they appeared we were con- cious of their presence.

Two of the most highly pitched American voices I have ever heard were saying civil things to our host and Lady Grenellen. More highly pitched than Hephzibah's, and that is the highest, I thought, there could be in the world!

"She is awfully good-looking," whispered Babykins, who caught sight of them first as they came through the hall.

The aunt walked in front with Lady Grenellen, a tall woman with a keen, dark face of the red Indian type, with pure white hair, beautifully done, and a perfect dignity of carriage.

The heiress followed with the Duke. She is small and plump and feminine-looking, with the sweetest dimpled face and great brown eyes. Both were exquisitely dressed and carried little bags at their waists. Their manner had complete assurance, without a trace of self-consciousness.

Lady Grenellen had told us all their history. Not a possible drop of blood bluer than a navvy's could circulate in their veins, and yet their wrists were fine, their heads were small, and their general appearance was that of gentlewomen.

I seemed to see pictures and sounds of my earliest childhood as they spoke. I took to them at once.

Following the English custom, Lady Grenellen did not introduce them to any one but Babykins, who happened to step forward, and we all proceeded to lunch, which was laid at small, round tables.

The Duke wore an air of comic distress. His eyebrows were raised as though trying to understand a foreign language.

I sat with Lady Tilchester at another table, and we could not hear most of their conversation, only the sentences of the American ladies, and they sounded like

me one talking down the telephone in one of the plays saw in Paris. You only heard one side, not the swers back.

"Why, this is a real castle!" "You don't say!" "Yes, headed in the hall." "Miss Trumpet has all the statics. She read them in the guide-book coming along." calculate she knows more about your family history, ook, than you know yourself," etc., etc.

"What a pity they have voices like that!" exclaimed ady Tilchester. "I know Berty will be put off, he is so diculously fastidious, and it is absolutely necessary that should marry an heiress."

"The niece is young. Perhaps hers could be softened," said. "She is so pretty, too."

Lady Tilchester looked at me suddenly. She had not stened to what I said.

"Oh, dear Mrs. Gurrage, you will help us to secure this rl? I ask you frankly, because, of course, the Duke in love with you, and he naturally would not be npressed with Miss Trumpet."

I should have been angry if any one else had said this. ut there is something so adorable about Lady Tilchester; e can say anything.

"You are quite mistaken. I have only seen the Duke your house," I said, smiling, "and a man cannot get love on so short an acquaintance, can he?—besides, y being only just married."

"I suppose you have not an idea how beautiful you re, dear," she said, kindly. "Much as I like you, I most wish you were not staying here now."

"I promise I will do my best to encourage the Duke marry Miss Trumpet, if you wish it," I said. "I think e knows it is a necessity from what he said to me."

"Then I shall carry you up-stairs this afternoon out

of harm's way," she said, with her exquisite smile. "Berty always gives me a dear little sitting-room next my room, and we can have a regular school-girls' chat over the fire."

Nothing could have pleased me better. I would rather talk to this dear lady than any Duke in the world.

After lunch some introductions were gone through.

"Now I am proud to be presented to you," said the aunt to Lady Tilchester, with perfect composure. "We have heard a great deal of you in our country, and my niece, Miss Trumpet, has always had the greatest admiration for your photograph."

The niece, meanwhile, talked to me.

There is something so fresh and engaging about her that in a few moments one almost forgot her terrible voice.

"Why, it does seem strange," she said, "with the veneration we have in America for really old things, to hear the Duke" (she does not quite say Dook, like the aunt. It sounds more like Juke) "call this castle an old 'stone-heap.' I am just longing to see the place his ancestor was beheaded upon in May, 1485. The Duke hardly seems to know about it, but I have been led to expect, from the guide-book, that I should see the blood on the stones."

The beautiful young man, Lord Luffton, now engaged her in conversation, and as Lady Tilchester and I left the hall both he and the Duke were escorting Miss Trumpet to the dais—no doubt to turn up the carpet and search for the traditional blood upon the steps.

"They are the most wonderful nation," Lady Tilchester said, as she linked her arm in mine. "Here is a girl looking as well bred as any of us—more so than most of us—probably beautifully educated, and accomplished, too,

nd whose father began as a common navvy or miner ut in the West. The mother is dead—she took in wash- ng, Cordelia says—and yet she was the sister of Miss Martina B. Cadwallader! How on earth do they manage o look like this?"

"It is wonderful, certainly. It must be the climate," I hazarded.

"We cannot do it in England. Think of the terrible reature a girl with such parentage would be here. Pic- ure her ankles and hands! And the self-consciousness, r the swagger, this situation would display!"

I thought of Mrs. Dodd and the Gurrage commercial elations generally.

"Yes, *indeed*," I said.

"They are so adaptable," she continued. "It does not eem to matter into what nation they marry, they seem to ssimilate and fit into their places. When this little thing s a duchess, you will see she will fulfil the position to a ee. Berty will be very lucky if he secures her."

"I think Lord Luffton will be a much greater tumbling-block than I shall," I laughed. "Perhaps he ikes the idea of fifty thousand a year, too."

"Oh, Cordelia will see about that. Babykins, who knows everything, tells me she has fallen wildly in love with Luffy. He has only arrived back from the war bout a week. And she will not let any other woman nterfere with her. I had heard another story about her n Scotland. They told me she was having an affair with ome—" she stopped suddenly, no doubt remembering to whom she was talking—"foreigner." She ended the sentence with perfect tact.

The little sitting-room is in a turret and is octagon- shaped, a dainty, charming, old-world room that grand- mamma might have lived in.

We drew two chairs up to the fire and sat down cosily.

How kind and gracious and altogether charming this woman can be! Again I can only compare her to the sun's rays, so warm and comfortable she makes one feel. There is a nobleness and a loftiness about her which causes even ordinary things she says to sound like fine sentiments. No wonder Mr. Budge adores her.

We spoke very little of people. She told me of her interests and all the schemes to benefit mankind she has in hand. At last she said:

"You have not been to Dane Mount yet, have you?"

"No. We are going there on Monday, after we leave here."

"It will interest you deeply, I am sure." And she looked into the fire. "Antony stayed with you, did he not?"

"Yes," I said, and my voice sounded strained, remembering that terrible visit.

She was silent for a few moments.

"I want you to be friends with me, dear," she said, so gently. "You are, perhaps, not always quite happy, and if ever I can do anything for you I want you to know I will."

"Oh, dear Lady Tilchester," I said, "you have been so kind and good to me already I shall never forget it. And I am a stranger, too, and yet you have troubled about me."

"I liked you from the first moment we met, at the Tilchester ball. And Antony is so interested in you, and we are such dear old friends I should always be prejudiced in favor of any one he thought worth liking."

There were numbers of things I wished to ask her,

but somehow my tongue felt tied. It was almost a relief when she turned the conversation.

Soon the daylight faded and the servants brought lamps.

"It is almost five," she said, at last. "What a happy afternoon we have had! I know you ever so much better now, dear. Well, I suppose the time has come to put on tea-gowns and descend to see how affairs are progressing."

I rose.

"I am going to call you Ambrosine," she said, and she kissed me. "I am not given to sudden friendships, but there is something about your eyes that touches me. Oh, dear, I hope fate will not force you to commit some midsummer madness as I did, to regret to the end of your days!"

All the way to my room her words puzzled me. What could she mean?

CHAPTER XII

The scene was picturesque and pretty as I looked at it from the gallery that crosses the hall.

Tea was laid out on a large, low table, with plates and jam and cakes and muffins—a nice, comfortable, substantial meal. A fire of whole logs burned in the colossal, open chimney. The huge, heavily shaded lamps concentrated all the light beneath them, viewed from above.

And like a group of summer-flowers the women, in their light and fluffy tea-gowns, added the touch of grace to the heavy darkness of the old stone walls. I paused a while and watched them.

Lady Grenellen, gorgeous as a sultana, seemed to have collected all the cushions to enhance her comfort as she lay back in a low, deep sofa. Augustus sat beside her. From here one could not see his ugliness, and the dark claret color of his smoking-suit rather set off her gown. She had the most alluring expression upon her face, which just caught the light. His attitude was humble. The storm, for the present, was over between them.

Two other women, the heiress, Babykins, and Lord Tilchester, and several young men sat round the table like children eating their bread-and-jam.

The Duke and Miss Martina B. Cadwallader were examining the armor. Some one was playing the piano softly. Merry laughter floated upward. I doubt if any other country could produce such a scene. It would have pleased grandmamma.

"Why, by the stars and stripes, there is a ghost in the

gallery!" exclaimed Miss Corrisande K. Trumpet, pointing to me. The faint glimmer of my white velvet tea-gown must have caught her eyes as I moved away.

"No, I am not a ghost," I called, "and I am coming down to eat hot muffins." So I crossed and descended the turret stairs.

Lady Tilchester had not appeared yet.

I sat down at the table next "Billy." It was all so gay and friendly no one could feel depressed.

Viewed close, Miss Trumpet was, for her age, too splendidly attired. She looked prettier in her simple travelling-dress. But her spirits and her repartee left nothing to be desired. She kept us all amused, and, whether Lady Grenellen would eventually permit it or no, Lord Luffton seemed immensely *épris* with her now.

There was only one other girl at the table, Lady Agatha de Champion, and her slouching, stooping figure and fuzzed hair did not show to advantage beside the heiress's upright, rounded shape and well-brushed waves.

"Where have you been all the afternoon?" demanded the Duke, reproachfully, over my shoulder. "I searched everywhere down-stairs, and finally sent to your room, but your maid knew nothing of you."

"I have been sitting with Lady Tilchester in her sitting-room," I said, smiling.

"Here comes Margaret. She shall answer to me for kidnapping my guests like this." And he went forward to meet her.

"Do not scold me," said Lady Tilchester, as she returned with him. "I think Mrs. Gurrage will tell you we have spent a very pleasant afternoon."

"Indeed, yes," I said.

"And I mean to spend a pleasant evening," he whispered, low, to me. "As soon as you have eaten that

horrid muffin I shall carry you off to see my pictures."

I looked at Lady Tilchester. What would she wish me to do?

"Impress upon him the necessity of being charming to the heiress. You were quite right. He has a serious rival," she whispered, and we walked off.

The Duke can be agreeable in his unattractive, lackadaisical way. He is so full of information, not of the statistical kind like Miss Trumpet, but the result of immense cultivation.

"What do you think of my heiress?" he said, at last, as we paused beneath a Tintoretto. I said everything suitable and encouraging I could think of.

"I am quite pleased with her," he allowed, "but I fear she will not be content with the rôle I had planned out for my Duchess. She is too individual. I feel it is I who would subside and attend to the nurseries and the spring cleaning. However, I mean to go through with it, although I am in a hideous position, because, you know, I am falling very deeply in love with you."

"How inconvenient for you!" I said, smiling. "But please do not let that interfere with your prospects. You must attend to the subject of pleasing the heiress, as I see great signs of Lord Luffton cutting the ground from under your feet."

He stared at me incredulously.

"Luffy!" he said, aghast. "Oh, but Cordelia would take care of that. He is her friend."

"Oh, how you amuse me, all of you," I said, laughing, "with your loves and your jealousies and your little arrangements! Every one two and two; every one with a 'friend.'"

"Anyway, we are not wearyingly faithful."

"No; but to a stranger you ought to issue a kind of

guide-book—'Trespassers will be prosecuted' here, 'A change would be welcomed' there, etc."

"'Pon my word new editions would have to come out every three months, then. In the space of a year you would find a general shuffle had taken place."

"Shall you let your Duchess have a 'friend'?" I asked.

He mused a little.

"Could I have found my cow brewer's daughter, she would have been too virtuously middle class to have thought of such a thing. And if I take this American—well, the Americans are so new a nation they have still a moral sense. So I think I am pretty safe."

"Old nations are deficient in this quality, then?"

"Yes. Artificial things are more worn out, and they get back nearer to nature."

"But you would object to a 'friend'?"

"Considerably, until the succession was firmly secured. After that, I suppose, my Duchess might please herself. She probably would, too, without consulting me. You don't see the whole of your neighbors eating cake and remain content with your own monotonous bread-and-butter."

This appeared to be very true. He continued in a meditative way:

"Because a few what we call civilized nations have set up a standard of morality for themselves, that does not change the ways of human nature. What we call morality has no existence in the natural world."

"Why should the respectable middle-class brewer's daughter have so strong a sense of it, then?" I asked.

"Because propriety is their god from one generation to another. You can almost overcome nature with a god, sometimes. Babykins has a theory that the food we eat makes a difference in the ways of our class, but I

don't believe that. It is because we hunt and shoot and live lives of inclination, not compulsion, like the middle classes, and so we get back nearer to nature."

"You are a sophist, I fear," I said, smiling. "See, here is Miss Martina B. Cadwallader advancing upon us. Stern virtue is on every line of her face, anyway!"

"Pardon me, Dook," she said, "but the guide to Myrlton I purchased at the station gave me to understand I should find a second portrait of Queen Elizabeth in this gallery. I cannot see it. Would you be good enough to indicate the picture to me?"

"Oh, that was a duplicate," said the Duke, resignedly. "I sold it at Christie's last year. It brought me in ten thousand pounds—more than it was worth. I lived in comfort upon it for quite six months."

"You don't say!" said Miss Martina B. Cadwallader.

Before the party said good-night, the meanest observer could have told that things were going at sixes and sevens, no one doing exactly what was expected of them.

Signs of disturbance showed as early as the few minutes before dinner.

Lord Luffton was openly seeking the society of the heiress, with no regard to the blandishments of Lady Grenellen. But by half-past eleven the clouds had spread all round.

Augustus, perhaps, looked the most upset. He had spent an evening on thorns of jealousy. First, snubbed sharply by the fair Cordelia; then, having to witness her ineffectual attempts to detach Lord Luffton from Miss Trumpet.

The Duke, while devoting himself to me, could not quite conceal his annoyance at the turn affairs were taking.

Miss Martina B. Cadwallader was plainly irritated with

her niece for not attending to the business they had come for. Babykins was exerting her mosquito propensities and stinging every one all round. In fact, only the few casual guests, who did not count one way or another, seemed calm and undisturbed.

"It is really provoking," Lady Tilchester said to me. "What on earth did they ask Luffy here for? He is noted for this sort of thing, and, of course, posing as a war hero adds an extra lustre to his charms."

The only two people supremely unconscious of delinquencies were the causes of all the trouble—Lord Luffton and Miss Trumpet.

They had gone off to look at the pictures in the long gallery, and at twenty minutes to twelve were nowhere to be seen.

Lady Grenellen's eyes flashed ominously.

"Let us go to bed," she said. "Berty, why don't you have the lights turned out?"

Fortunately the aunt did not hear this remark. As her face showed, she was quite capable of a sharp reply to anything, and though, no doubt, annoyed with the niece, would certainly defend her.

"We had better go and look for them," said the Duke.

"Perhaps they have fallen down the oubliette," suggested Babykins.

"You don't tell me there is danger?" demanded Miss Martina B. Cadwallader, anxiously. "On this trip I am answerable to her poppa for Corrisande's safety."

We started, more or less in a body, towards the gallery, Lady Tilchester, with her usual tact, stopping to point out any notable picture or tapestry to the aunt on the way, so that the search should not look too pointed.

In the farthest corner, perched on a high window-seat —that must have required a knowledge of vaulting to

reach—sat the guilty pair, dangling their feet. Anything more engaging than Miss Trumpet looked could not be imagined. The tiniest pink satin slippers peeped out of billows of exquisite *dessous*. Her little face seemed a mass of dimpling smiles. Not a trace of embarrassment appeared in her manner.

"I say, Duke," she called, "you have got a sweet place here. We have been watching for the monk to pass, but he has not come yet."

The Duke stepped forward to help her down.

"Don't you trouble," she said. "Why, we had a gymnasium at the convent. I can jump."

Lady Grenellen now appeared upon the scene. She looked like an angry cat. I turned, with Lady Tilchester, and left the rest of the party. What happened I do not know, but when they joined us all in the hall again the heiress was with the Duke, Lord Luffton walked alone, while Augustus, once more beaming, was close to Lady Grenellen's side. So it is an ill wind that blows no one any good.

Next day, after a delightful shooting-lunch and a brisk walk back, the heiress came to my room and talked to me.

She had apparently taken a great fancy to me, and we had had several conversations.

"I don't know why, but you give me the impression that you are a stranger, too, like Aunt Martina and me," she said. "You don't look at all like the rest of the Englishwomen. Why, your back is not nearly so long. I could almost take you for an American, you are so *chic*."

I laughed.

"Even Lady Tilchester, who is by far the nicest and grandest of them, does not look such an aristocrat as you do."

(Miss Trumpet pronounces it *arrist*-tocrat.)

"I assure you, I am a very ordinary person," I said. "But you are right, I am a stranger, too."

"Now I am glad to hear that," said Miss Trumpet, beginning to polish her nails with my polisher, which was lying on the dressing-table. "Because then I can talk to you. You know I have come here to sample the Duke. Poppa is so set on the idea of my being a duchess. But it seems to me, if you are going to buy a husband, you might as well buy the one you like best. Don't you think so?"

"I entirely agree with you," I said, feelingly. "You would probably be happier with the one you prefer, even if he were only a humble baron." And I smiled at her slyly.

"Now that is just what I wanted to ask you about. But if I took Lord Luffton, instead of the Duke, should I have to walk a long way behind at the Coronation next year?"

"I am afraid you would," I said.

She looked puzzled and undecided.

"That is worrying me," she said. "As for the men themselves—well, we don't think so much of them over in America as you do here. It is no wonder Englishmen are so full of assurance, the way they are treated. You would never find an American woman showing a man she was madly jealous of him, like Lady Grenellen did last night. Why, we keep them in their places across the Atlantic."

"So I have heard," I said.

"I have been accustomed to be run after all my life," she continued, "so it does not amount to anything, a man making love to me. But he is beautiful, isn't he?—Lord Luffton, I mean."

"Yes, though he has the reputation of great fickleness. The Duke would probably make a better husband," I said.

I felt I owed it to Lady Tilchester to do something towards advancing the cause.

"Oh, as for that, a man always makes a good enough husband if you have the control of the dollars, and poppa would see to that," said Miss Trumpet.

This seemed so true I had nothing to say.

"Now, I will tell you," she continued, examining her nails, which shone as bright as glass. "I have got a kind of soft feeling for that Baron, but I would like to be an English duchess. Now, which would you take, if you were me?"

"Oh, I could not possibly advise you," I said. "You must weigh the advantages, and your level head will be sure to choose for the best."

"The position of an English duchess is splendid, though, isn't it? An Italian duke came over last fall, and poppa thought of him for about a day. But there is the bother of a foreign language, and all their silly ways to learn, so I told poppa I would have an English one or marry an American. It does seem a pity I can't have both the Baron and the Duke!" and she laughed with girlish mirth.

I thought of my conversation the night before, and wondered.

That evening the Duke, also, made me confidences.

He was immensely taken with Miss Trumpet, he allowed, and could almost look upon the matter as a pleasure instead of a duty now.

"If you had shown the slightest sign that you would ever care for me, I should not have thought of her,

hough," he said. "You will be sorry, one day, that you re as cold as ice."

"Why should a person be accused of having no musical ense because one particular tune does not cause one hapsodies?" I asked. "The one idea of a man seems o be, if a woman does not adore him personally, it is ecause she is as cold as ice. Surely that is illogical."

He looked at me very straightly for a moment.

"I believe you do care for some one," he said. "I hall watch and see."

"Very well," I laughed.

"You are a dangerously attractive woman, you know—ne's idea of what a lady ought to look like. And you nove with a grace one never sees now. And your eyes —your eyes are the eyes of the Sphinx. I fancy, if I ould make you care, I would forget all the world."

"I understood you to say you were greatly attracted by Miss Trumpet," I said, demurely.

And so the evening passed.

"I think it is going all right," Lady Tilchester said to ne as we walked up-stairs together. "They are making rrangements to meet in London, and Luffy has not been sked to join the theatre-party."

"No. He is going to lunch and to take them to skate," said.

"Oh, the clever girl!" and she laughed. "But I expect he will decide to be a duchess, in the end."

"If you could tell her anything especially splendid bout her position at the Coronation next year, should she ccept the Duke, I am sure it would have an effect."

"Cordelia is behaving like a fool about it. She asked hem here, and made all the arrangements, and now is bsolutely uncivil to them."

"How flattered Lord Luffton ought to be!" I laughed.

"Yes, if it were any one else; but Cordelia has too many fancies. How glad one should be that one has other interests in life! Really, when I look round at most of my friends, I feel thankful. Perhaps, otherwise, I should have been as they are."

Augustus had greatly profited by Lord Luffton's defection. Whether it was to make the latter jealous, I do not know, but Lady Grenellen had been remarkably gracious to him all the evening.

I learned, casually, that she was to be the fourth at Dane Mount.

"We shall be such a little party," she said. "Only myself and you and your husband. I asked Antony to take me in, as it is on the road to Headbrook, where I go the next day. I thought he was having a large party, though."

I wished she was not going; there seemed something degrading about the arrangement.

I had not let myself think of this visit. And now it would be the day but one after to-morrow!

A strange restlessness and excitement took possession of me. I could not sleep.

It was a raw, foggy morning when we all left Myrlton. The Duke accompanied us to London, and we were a merry party in the train, in spite of eight of us playing bridge.

Augustus told me he had business in town, and would stay the night and over Sunday, arriving at Dane Mount by the four-o'clock train on Monday.

"If you leave home at three, in the motor," he said, "we shall get there exactly at the same time."

And so I returned to Ledstone alone.

CHAPTER XIII

The fog was white round the windows as I came down to my solitary breakfast on the 4th. My heart sank. What if it should be too thick for me to start? I could not bear to think of the disappointment that would be.

I forced myself to practise for an hour after breakfast. Then I wrote a long letter to the Marquis de Rochermont. Then I looked again at my watch and again at the fog. I should start at half-past two, to give plenty of time, as we should certainly have to go slowly.

At last, at last, luncheon came. I never felt less hungry, nor had the servants ever appeared so pompous and slow. It seemed as if it could never be half-past two.

However, it struck eventually, and the automobile came round to the door.

For the first five miles the fog was very thick. We had to creep along. Then it lifted a little, then fell again. But at half-past four we turned into the lodge-gates. I could see nothing in front of me. The trees seemed like gaunt ghosts, with the mist and the dying daylight. The drive across the park and up the long avenue was fraught with difficulty. Even when we arrived I could see nothing but the bright lights from the windows. But as the door was thrown open, I realized that Antony was standing there against the flood of brightness.

I seem always to be saying my heart beats, but there is no other way of describing the extraordinary and unusual physical sensation that happens to me when I meet this man.

"Welcome!" he said, as he helped me out of the automobile. "Welcome to Dane Mount!"

A broad corridor, full of trophies of the chase and armor and carved oak, leads to a splendid hall, high to the top of the house, with a great staircase and galleries running round. It is hung with tapestry and pictures, and full of old and beautiful furniture.

Three huge, rough-coated hounds lay on the lion-skin before the fire. They rose, haughtily, to greet me.

"Ulfus, Belfus, and Bedevere, come and be introduced to a fair lady," said Antony. "You can be quite civil, she is of the family."

The dogs came forward.

"What darlings!" I said, and patted them all. They received the caresses with dignity, and, without gush, made me understand they were glad to see me.

Then we said some banal things to each other—Antony and I—about the fog and the difficulty of getting here and the length of the drive.

I did not look at him much. I felt excited and awkward—and happy.

"I am not going to let you stay here a minute in those damp things," he said. "I shall give you into the hands of Mrs. Harrison, my housekeeper, to take you to your room. When you have got into a tea-gown, you will find me here again." And he rang the bell.

Grandmamma would have approved of Mrs. Harrison when she appeared. She is like the housekeepers one reads of in books—stately and plump, and clothed in black silk, with a fat gold-and-cameo brooch fastening a neat cambric collar.

She conducted me up the staircase and into the most exquisite bedroom I have ever dreamed of in my life.

It is white, and panelled, and full of really old and

beautiful French furniture. Everything is in keeping even to the locks on the doors and the bell-ropes. How grandmamma would have appreciated this! And the fineness of the linen, and the softness of the pillows and sofa-cushions! And everywhere great bowls of roses—my favorite flower. Roses in November!

"Oh, what a lovely room!" I exclaimed, as I went round and looked at everything.

"It is pretty, ma'am. It has only just been arranged," said Mrs. Harrison, much gratified. "Sir Antony bid me ask you to order anything you can possibly want."

Then she indicated which bell rang into my maid's room and which for the house-maids, and with a few more polite wishes for my comfort, and the information that the room prepared for Augustus was some way down the corridor, on the right, she left me in McGreggor's hands.

With great promptness the luggage had been carried up, so I was not long getting into a tea-gown.

Augustus and Lady Grenellen would have arrived by the time I got down to the hall again. They ought to have been here before me, but no doubt the train was late.

The soft *crêpe de chine* of my skirts made no *frou-frou*. Antony did not see me as I looked over the bend of the stairs descending; he was staring into the fire, an expression I have never seen before on his face.

I stopped. Presently he looked up.

"How silently you came, Comtesse! I did not hear you."

"You were thinking deeply. Upon what grave matters of state?"

"None at all. Do you know Lady Grenellen and your husband have not arrived? The brougham has with dif-

ficulty returned from the station after waiting until the train was in, and there was no sign of them."

A joy, unbidden and instantly suppressed, pervaded me as he spoke.

"Perhaps they missed the train and will catch the next," I hazarded.

"The fog in London is quite exceptional, the guard said. I have given orders for the coachman to return and try for the next train. It gets in at 6.42. After that there is one at 7, and the last one is at 10.18. But they will probably telegraph."

"It makes me laugh," I said.

"Come and have tea. We shall not bother our heads about them. They are, fortunately, well able to take care of themselves."

Antony led the way to the library, where the tea was laid out.

I never have sat in such a comfortable sofa or felt more cosily at home. Everything pleased me. All is in perfect taste.

Antony talked to me gayly as he gave me some tea. It was as if he wanted to remove the least feeling of awkwardness this unusual situation might possibly cause me to feel.

Ulfus, Belfus, and Bedevere had followed us, and now lay, like three grim guardians, upon the tiger-skin hearth-rug.

"How is your arm?" I asked.

"Oh, that is all right. I had the shot taken out and it has quite healed up. Wonderful escape we had that day!" And he laughed.

"And you were so good about it! Augustus said he would have shot back if Mr. Dodd had hit him."

"Mrs. Dodd would have made a nice target. One does

not often come across a person like that. Are all your guests at Ledstone of the same sort as those I met?"

"No. Some of them are worse," I replied, gravely, smiling at him. "Next time you shall come to an earlier party. You would enjoy that." And I laughed, thinking of the first batch of relations we had entertained.

"I will come whenever you ask me," he said, quite simply.

"No. You know I would never ask you again, if I could help it. Oh, you were so kind, but it—" I stopped. I did not know how to say what I meant. I had better not have said so much.

"I don't want you to have that feeling. It amuses me to come, Comtesse, only you feed one too well. Do you remember how I drank everything I could get hold of, to please you?"

"You were ridiculous!" And I laughed.

"I thought I was heroic." Then, in another voice: "I think you must have that boudoir altered a little, you know, before long. I can't say I found your sofa comfortable."

"Not like this." And I lay back luxuriously.

"I generally choose things with a reason, if I can."

"That sounds like one of grandmamma's speeches." Then I stupidly blushed, remembering, apropos of what she had said, almost the same thing. It was when she accepted Mrs. Gurrage's invitation to the ball, where she calculated I should meet Antony. That was before she had the fainting-fit. I stared into the fire. What would have happened by now, if she could have carried out that plan—the "suitable and happy" arrangement of my future!

"Comtesse, why do you stop suddenly and blush, and then stare into the fire? Your grandmother was not, I

am sure, in the habit of saying such startling things as to cause you such emotions."

I looked up at him. I suppose my eyes were troubled, for he said, so gently:

"Dear little girl, I won't tease you. Tell me, have you read any more books on philosophy lately?"

I drank the last sip of my tea, and held out my cup. It was nice tea.

"No, I have not had time to read anything. There, you can take my cup. You have such pretty things here. Everything is suitable, and it gives me pleasure. I don't feel philosophical; I feel genuine human enjoyment."

"That is good to know. Well, we won't be philosophical, then, we will be humanly happy," and he sat down beside me.

I took up, idly, a little book that was lying on a table near, because my silly heart had begun to beat again, like Lydia Languish or any vaporish young lady in an early romance. I looked at the title and Antony looked at me. I read it over without taking in the sense, and then the name arrested my attention.

"A Digit of the Moon," I said. "What a queer title!"

"What long eyelashes you have, Comtesse!" said Antony, apropos of nothing. "They make a great shadow on your cheek, and they have no business to be so dark, with your light, mud-colored hair."

"How rude, to call my hair mud-colored!" I said, indignantly. "I always thought it was *blond cendré.*"

"So it is, and it shines like burnished metal. But you are a vain little thing, I expect, and I did not wish to encourage you."

His voice was full of a caress. I did not dare to look into his queer cat's eyes.

"You have black eyelashes yourself, and as I am of the family, why may I not have them too?" I said, pouting.

"Of course you can have them or anything else you wish, to oblige you. But I should rather like to know how long your hair is when you let it down. You look as if you had a great quantity there, but probably it is not all your own." And he smiled provokingly.

"If I was not afraid of the servants coming in I would undo it to show you," I replied, with great indignation and a sudden feeling that I, too, could tease. "I never heard anything so insulting!"

"My servants are well trained. It is not six o'clock yet. They won't come in until half-past six, unless I ring. You have plenty of time."

A spirit of *coquetterie* came over me for the first time in my life. I took out the two great tortoise-shell pins that held it up, and let my hair tumble down around me. It falls in heavy waves nearly to my knees.

"That is perfectly beautiful!" said Antony, almost reverently. "I apologize. It is your own."

I got up and shook it out and stood before him. It hung all round me like a cloak. Oh, I was in a wicked mood, and I do not defend my conduct.

"Comtesse," he said, and his eyes swam, "fiendish little temptress, put up that hair. And come, I will tell you about *A Digit of the Moon.*"

I pretended to feel greatly snubbed, and in a minute had twisted it to my head again.

"It is a queer title," I said.

Antony talked a little faster than usual. It seemed as if he was breathing rather quickly.

"I shall give you this book. It only came out last year.

I think it is one of the most delightful things that ever was written. You must read it carefully." And he put it into my hand. "The description, in the beginning, of the ingredients which God used to create woman is quite exquisite. Listen, I will read it to you." And he took the book again.

His voice is the most refined and the tones are deep. One cannot say what quality there is in some voices and pronunciation that makes them so attractive. If Antony were an ugly man he still would be alluring with such a voice as his. I listened intently until the last word.

"It is, indeed, a beautiful description," I said.

"You probably are all those things, Comtesse, except, perhaps, the 'chattering of the monkeys.' You don't speak much."

"And do you feel like 'man'?"

"That I cannot do with you, or without you? Yes, especially the latter part of the sentence."

I got up from the sofa and looked about the room. It seemed as if we were getting on dangerous ground.

"How comfortable men make their habitations! And I like the smell," I said, sniffing. "The pine-logs, I suppose."

"And the cedar panelling, perhaps, scents the place a little when it gets hot."

"You have thousands of books here." And I looked round at the high shelves between the long windows. "And what a nice piano! How happy you must be!"

"I should have been—and am sometimes, still," he said. "The Duke had a good room, too, at Myrlton."

I sat down on the sofa again. Antony had risen and leaned against the mantelpiece. He was idly pulling the ears of Bedevere, who, sitting there, reached up into his

hand. I never could have imagined dogs so big as are these three.

"Of course you went to Myrlton. I had forgotten. The Duke made love to you, I suppose?"

"Why should you suppose?"

"Because I saw signs of it at Harley. Don't you remember how I carried you off to the woods while he fetched your umbrella?"

I laughed.

"Well, did he make love to you?"

"Why should you think any man would make love to me? It is ridiculous. You seem to forget I have only been married five months. Even in a well-bred world, where they have gone back to nature, they don't begin as soon as that, do they?"

"You are prevaricating. He did make love to you, then?"

"Lady Grenellen had brought an heiress there for him, and he was busy with her."

"And you made it as difficult for him as possible to do his duty. How heartless of you, Comtesse! I would not have believed it of you."

His voice was more mocking than I had ever heard it.

"I did nothing of the kind."

"He is an agreeable fellow, Berty."

"Full of information."

"Superficial."

"Possibly."

Then our eyes met.

"Comtesse, we are not here to talk about the Duke of Myrlshire in these our few minutes of grace. The 6.42 train will soon be in." And he sat down again beside me.

"What shall we talk about, then?" I asked, trying to

keep my head. A maddening sensation of excitement made my voice sound strained. "First, I want to tell you how beautiful I find my room. If you had known my taste, and had it done to please me, you could not have found anything I should like so much."

"I did know your taste, and I had it done to please you. It is for you. No one else shall ever sleep there," he said, simply, and looked deep into my eyes.

I had nothing to say.

"I like to know there is a room for you in my house. I want everything in it to be exactly as you desire. When you have time to look, I think you will find some agreeable books, and your old friends La Rochefoucauld, etc. But if there is a thing you want changed, it would give me pleasure to change it."

I was stupefied. I could not speak.

"Over the mantelpiece is the little pastel by La Tour I told you I bought last year."

"Oh! it is good of you!" I managed to say.

"I have at least the satisfaction of knowing that I please myself too if it gives you pleasure. I want you to feel there is one corner in the world where you are really at home with the things that are sympathetic to you, so that whenever you will come over like this it will give you a feeling of repose."

"Oh! it is dear of you!"

"You said the other day," he continued, "that I, at all events, was never serious, and I told you I would tell you that when you came here to Dane Mount. Well, I tell you now—I am serious in this—that if there is anything in the world I can do to make you happy I will do it."

"It makes me happy to know you understand—that there is some one of my kin. Oh! I have been very lonely since grandmamma died!"

He looked at me long, and we neither of us spoke.

"It was a very cruel turn of fate that we did not meet this time last year," he said at last.

"Yes."

"Comtesse, I want to make your life happier. I want to introduce you to several nice women I know. I shall have a big party next month. Will you come and stay again? Then you will gradually get a pleasant society round you, and you need not trouble about the Dodds and the Springers— no, Springle was their name, wasn't it?"

"Yes. It is so kind of you, all this thought for me. Oh, Sir Antony, I have nothing to say!" I faltered.

He frowned.

"Do not call me *Sir* Antony, child. It hurts me. You must not forget we are cousins. You are Ambrosine to me, or my dearest little Comtesse."

The clock struck half-past six. The servants entered the room to take the tea-things away, and while they were there a footman brought in three telegrams, one for me and two for my host.

Mine was from Augustus, and ran:

"Hope you have arrived safely. Hear fog bad in country too. Impossible to get to Liverpool Street yet. Awfully worried at your being alone there. Shall come by last train."

Antony handed the two others to me. One was from Lady Grenellen, the other from Augustus, both expressing their annoyance and regret. The telegrams were all sent off at the same hour from Piccadilly, so apparently they were together, my husband and his friend.

"It is comic," I said, "this situation! Augustus and Lady Grenellen fog-bound in London, and you and I here, and it is the fault of none of us."

"I like a fog," said Antony, with his old, whimsical smile, all trace of seriousness departed. "A good, useful thing, a fog. Hope it won't lift in a hurry."

"Now come and show me the ancestors," I said.

He led the way to the drawing-room—a great room, all painted white, too, and in each faded green-brocade panel hangs a picture. The electric lights are so arranged that each was perfectly illuminated.

They were all interesting to me, especially the portraits of our common ancestors.

"That must be your grandfather's father," said Antony, pointing to a portly gentleman, with lightly powdered hair and a blue riding-coat, painted at the end of the eighteenth century. "It was his eldest son, who had no sons, and left the place to his daughter, who married Sir Geoffrey Thornhirst."

"But where is your great-great-grandmother that you told me about, and rather insinuated she was as nice as my Ambrosine Eustasie de Concourt?"

"There she is, in the place of honor. She was painted by Gainsborough, after she married. What do you think of her?"

"Oh! she is lovely," I said, "and she has your cat's eyes."

"She is your ancestress, too, but she is not like you. Do you see the dog in the picture?"

"Yes. Why, it is just the portrait of one of your three knights!"

"Have you never heard the tradition, then?"

"No."

"As long as Dane Mount possesses that breed of dogs

fortune is to favor the owner; but if they die out I can't tell you what calamities are not to overtake him. It has been going for hundreds of years."

"Then Ulfus, Belfus, and Bedevere are the descendants of that dog in the picture?"

"Yes."

"No wonder they give themselves such airs."

"Do you hear that, boys?" said Antony, turning to the three, who had again followed us. "My Comtesse says you give yourselves airs. Come and die for her to show her your real sentiments."

The three great fellows advanced in their dignified way, casting adoring glances at their master.

"Now die, all of you!"

They sneezed and curled up their lips, and made the usual grimaces of dogs when they are moved and self-conscious, but they all three lay flat down at my feet.

"I *am* flattered," I said, "and I have not even a biscuit to give you."

"We are not so sordid as that at Dane Mount. We do not die for biscuits, but because we love the lady," said Antony.

I bent down and kissed Ulfus, who was nearest to me.

"Now I am going to show you some Thornhirst pictures and some older Athelstans that are in the hall and the dining-room, and a portrait of my mother that I have in my own smoking-room."

Antony made the most interesting guide. There was something amusing and to the point about all his comments. I soon knew the different characteristics of each member of the family. One or two, especially of the Thornhirsts, are wonderfully like him—the same level, dark eyebrows and firm mouths.

"This is my sanctum," he said, at last, opening a door

down a corridor, and we went into a large room with a lower ceiling than the rest of the apartments I had been into. It is panelled with cedar-wood also and sparely hung with old prints. A delicious smell of burning pine-logs again greeted me. The thick, silk curtains were drawn. The lamps were softly shaded. An old dog of the same family as the three knights basked before the fire. It was all cosey and homelike.

"Oh! this is a nice room, too!" I exclaimed.

"I spend a good deal of time here. One grows to like one's rooms."

His mother's portrait hangs over the fireplace, a charming face, whose beauty is not even disguised by the hideous fashions of 1870, when it was painted.

"She died when I was in Russia," said Antony.

My eyes fell on the mantelpiece. The narrow ledge held three photographs, one of a man, one of Lady Tilchester, and the centre one—an amateur production, evidently—of a little girl with bare feet, putting one fat toe into a stream, her hat hanging down her back, and her face bent down looking at the water.

"What a dear little picture," I said. "Who is that?"

"Oh, that is the Tilchester child, Muriel Harley," he said, carelessly. "We snap-shotted her paddling in the burn in Scotland a year or two ago. Come, it is dressing-time. I must send you up-stairs." And then, as we left the room, "You look so comfortable in that tea-gown! Don't bother to change," he said.

"Why deprive me of displaying to you the splendors I brought over on purpose?" I said, gayly, as I ran up the broad steps.

CHAPTER XIV

I do not think there can be a more agreeable form of entertainments than a tête-à-tête dinner, provided your companion is sympathetic; anyway, to me this will always be one of the golden hours in my life to look back upon.

Never had Antony been so attractive. Every sentence well expressed, and only when one came to think of them afterwards, one discovered their subtle flattery.

By the time the servants had finally left the room, I felt like a purring cat, whose fur has been all stroked the right way, at peace with the world!

The dinner had been exquisite, but I was too excited to feel hungry.

"Comtesse," said Antony, looking at the clock, "there is one good hour before the arrivals by the last train can possibly get here; shall we spend it in the library or the drawing-room?" He did not suggest his own sitting-room.

"The library; it is more cosy." As he held the door open for me, there was an expression in his face which again caused me the ridiculous sensation I have spoken of so often—I suddenly realized that life at some moments is worth living. Perhaps grandmamma and the Marquis were right after all, and these glimpses of Paradise are the compensations.

"Will you play to me, Comtesse?" Antony said, when we got to the library, and he opened the piano. "I shall be selfish, and sit in a comfortable chair, and listen to you."

I am not a great musician; but grandmamma always

said my playing gave her pleasure. The music makes me feel, so perhaps that is why it makes others feel too.

I played on, it seemed to me a long time; then after some tender bits of Grieg running from one to another, I suddenly stopped. The music had been talking too much to me; it said over and over again: "Ambrosine, you love this man; he is beginning to absorb the whole of your life"; and again: "Life is short; this happiness will be over in a few moments—live while you may."

"Why do you stop, Comtesse?" asked Antony, in a moved voice.

"I—do not know."

He rose and came and leant on the piano; I felt—— Oh! I had never been so agitated in my life—at all costs he must not say anything to me—nothing that I should have to stop—nothing to break this beautiful dream.

"Oh! do you not hear the sound of carriage wheels?" I exclaimed in a half voice.

It broke the spell.

Antony walked to the window; he pulled the curtains aside, and opened a shutter to look upon the night.

"It is the thickest fog I ever remember," he said. "I doubt if the brougham which put up at the station could get back here, even if they have come by the last train."

"Oh! of course they have come!" I said unsteadily.

He did not answer, but carefully closed the shutter again and drew the curtains. I went to the fire-place and began caressing one of the dogs; my hands were cold as ice. Antony lost a little of his *sang-froid;* he picked up a paper-knife and put it down again.

It seemed to me my heart was thumping so loudly that he must hear it where he stood.

We both listened intently. Neither of us spoke. Eleven o'clock struck. The butler entered the room.

"Bilsworth has managed to get here on one of the horses, Sir Antony, and he says the last train is in, and no one arrived by it."

"Very well," said Antony calmly. "You can shut up for the night."

And the butler went out softly, closing the door behind him.

For a second Antony stood quite still then he came over close to me and held out his hands——

"Comtesse!—" he whispered——

I dared not look at him.

"—Ambrosine—Ah! God! how I love you——!"

"Oh please do not say it—" I cried, and my voice sounded as though it belonged to some third person and not myself.—"You know that I must not listen to you—Antony, help me—help us both."

The last words were almost a sob, they came as the cry of a soul in anguish; I seemed to be engulfed in a tide of emotion which must drown me, trying to struggle in it all alone.—

Antony took my hands and held them both between his palms—he drew me close to him and looked deep into my eyes.

"Ah! child! What do you think it has been from the moment you walked into my life from dreamland at the Yeomanry ball? I have been trying to blind myself, but to no purpose, each day you grew more dear——"

I could not fight any longer, I just stood there gazing at him helplessly. His strange greenish-gray eyes were filled with a magnetism which I could not understand—I felt that in another instant I should lose all power to resist and fall into his arms—and then . . . what then?——

His voice grew hoarse——

"Beloved angel—fate has given you to me here in my house—do you not see it—? I love you—I love you—I want you for my own—now—to-night——"

Then passion flamed up in me, every nerve in my body quivered with some divine exaltation—I longed, passionately longed, for him to take me in his arms and let me lie there forever—fused in some bliss I did not yet know——

"I—love—you, Antony"—I breathed hardly aloud—"I am completely at your mercy—I know that—I am yours—but oh, God! help me not to degrade my soul—If there was only to-night— Yes—but there is to-morrow—and all the other to-morrows——"

He dropped my hands and took a step backwards,—looking at me all the time.

"Ambrosine!—the torture of it——"

"Yes, I know, Beloved—" I whispered— "I have been a child and asleep all these months,—now I am a woman and awake—and crying out with everything in me for my mate—but dearest, there is something beyond all this for you and me—there is the seventh commandment—I cannot share myself between two men——"

Antony began to speak, but his voice died away into some fierce inarticulate cry, and he strode to the fireplace and there stood holding on to the back of a tall chair beside it.

"You are right"—the words came at last, but the tone was cold with pain, and his face was white and drawn.

"You are right, Ambrosine—now go—go to your room quickly—and for God's sake, lock your door——!"

CHAPTER XV

Perhaps there are other women besides myself in this world who have spent nights of agony—when every demon of earthly desire seems to be whispering "Surrender— Surrender to the loved one——"

When no price seems too great to pay—even that of death and Hell——

I had suddenly become a changed being—all superficial things of civilization burnt out of me——

Perhaps grandmamma's proud spirit helped me—I do not know—but towards dawn, I fell asleep exhausted with anguish, but a conqueror!—and slept dreamlessly until at eight o'clock McGreggor came to the door—and knocking, awoke me—she brought a telegram from Augustus—a long telegram, written the night before, telling me the fog was impossible to penetrate that night, and I was to come up and join him at once in London, as he had just decided to go to the war with his Yeomanry. He could not keep out of it longer, as all his brother officers had volunteered, so he had felt obliged to do so too; they were to start in less than three weeks.

"I shall go by the ten o'clock train," I told McGreggor, as I scribbled my reply.

"I must get up at once; ask for my breakfast to be brought up here."

I was dressed by nine o'clock, and sipping my chocolate.

The daintiness of the old Dresden china equipage

pleased me and forced itself upon my notice, in spite of the deep preoccupation of my mind.

An exquisite bunch of fresh roses lay on the tray, and a note from Antony, only a few dry words saying the brougham would be ready for me at half-past nine, and that he also was going to London.

McGreggor had left the room. Oh, am I very wicked —I kissed the writing before I threw the paper in the fire!

And so Augustus is going to the war after all; it must have been some very strong influence which persuaded him to volunteer, he, who hated the very thought.

I felt bitterly annoyed with myself, that this news did not cause me any grief. I have been this man's wife for five months, and his going into danger in a far country leaves me cold. But I did indeed grieve for his mother; her many good qualities came back to me. This will be a terrible blow to her.

I looked up at the little pastel by La Tour. The sprightly French Marquise smiled back at me.

"Good-bye," I said. "You—pretty Marquise—would call me a fool, because to-day Antony is not my lover, but I—oh! I am glad."

"Il s'en faut bien que nous connaissions tout ce que nos passions nous font faire!"

Once more La Rochefoucauld has spoken truth!

Why the situation is as it is, I cannot tell. In my bringing up, the idea of taking a lover after marriage seemed a more or less natural thing, and not altogether a deadly sin, provided the affair was conducted "sans fanfaronnade," without scandal. It was not that grandmamma and the Marquis actually discussed such matters in my hearing, but the general tone of their conversation gave that impression.

Marriage, as the Marquis said to me, was not a pleasure—but a means to an end—a tax of society. The *agréments* of life came afterwards. I had always understood he had been grandmamma's lover.

Once I heard him express this sentiment when I was supposed to be reading my book. The marriage vows, he said, were the only ones a gentleman might break without great blemish to his honor. This was the atmosphere I had always lived in, and since my wedding the people of my own class that I have met do not seem to hold different views. Lord Tilchester is Babykins' lover. The Duke has passed on from several women, and, to come nearer home, there are my husband and Lady Grenellen. Only Lady Tilchester seems noble, and above all these earthly things.

Why did I hesitate? I do not know. There is a something in my spirit which cried out against the meanness of it—the degradation, the sacrilege. I could not break my word to Augustus. Oh! I could not stoop to desecrate myself, and to act, for all the future, hours of deceit.

And now, after to-day, I will never see Antony alone again. That we shall casually meet, I cannot guard against. But never again shall I stay in his house—never again awake in this beautiful room—never again——

"The brougham is at the door, ma'm," said McGreggor, interrupting my thoughts, and I descended the stairs. The fog was still gray and raw, but had considerably lifted.

In the uncompromising daylight, Antony's face looked haggard and drawn.

"Comtesse," he said, as we drove along, "I canot forgive myself for causing you pain last night. Nothing

was further from my thoughts than to harass and disturb you—here in my own house—that I wanted you to look upon as your haven of rest; but the situation was exceptional, and—I love you."

In spite of our imminent parting, joy rushed through me at his words. Oh! could I ever get tired of hearing Antony say, "I love you."

"You did not cause me pain," I said; "we had drifted, neither knowing where—it was fate."

"I would promise never to say another word that could disturb you. Oh! why must we say good-bye?"

"Because I could not promise not to wish you to say things. You must surely know if we went on meeting it could only have one end."

"Well, I will do as you wish, my darling white rose. In my eyes you are above the angels."

Oh! Antony's voice when it is moved could wile a bird from off a tree!

Then I told him of my telegram, and I know he too felt glad that last night we had parted as we had done.

"Ambrosine, listen to me," he said; "I will not try to see you, but if you want anything in the world done for you, promise to let me do it?"

I promised.

The footman opened the door; we had arrived at the station.

The train was very full—and there was not a vacant carriage—an elderly pair were already seated in the one we entered. This was as well—we were both at breaking-point—but I do not think anyone seeing Antony calmly handing me into the hired brougham Augustus had sent to meet me, would have guessed that we were parting for ever—and that to me at least all joy in the world had fled.

It is stupid to go on talking about one's feelings. Hav-

ing cut off one's hand, I am sure grandmamma would say it would be drivelling and mawkish to meditate over each drop of blood.

I tried hard to think of other things. I counted the stupid pattern on the braid that ornamented the inside of the brougham. I counted the lamp-posts with their murky lights showing through the fog. I looked at McGreggor sitting stolidly opposite me. Could any emotions happen to that wooden mask? Have you a lover that you have said good-bye to for ever, I wonder? and is that why your face is carved out of stone? I said to myself.

Oh! in spite of all grandmamma's stoical bringing up, it was physical pain I was suffering.

In Queen Victoria Street a hansom passed us, and I caught a misty glimpse of Antony. He smiled mechanically as he raised his hat.

And so this is the end.

The fog is falling thickly again. Everything is damp and cold, and black as night.

And I— Oh! I wish——

"Hallo, little woman, glad to see you," said Augustus in a thick and tipsy voice, as I got out of the carriage and —he kissed me in front of all the people at the hotel door.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

The ship sailed a week ago and Augustus has gone to the war. Oh, I hate to look back and think of those dreadful three weeks before he started!

A nightmare of hideous scenes. Alternate drunkenness and inordinate affection for me, or sullen silence and cringing fear. Oh, of all the frightful moments there are in life, there can be none so dark as those that some women have to suffer from the drunken passions and ways of men!

Augustus would have deserted at the last moment if an opportunity had offered. His mother made matters worse, as, instead of remembering her country as so many mothers have, and sending her son on his way with brave and glorious words, she wept and lamented from morning till night.

"I told you so, Gussie," she said, when she first met us in London. "I was always against your joining that Yeomanry. I told you it wasn't only the uniform, and it might get you into trouble some day. Oh, to think that an extra glass of champagne could have made you volunteer. And now you've got to go to the war and you have broken my heart."

Augustus's own terror was pitiable to see if it had not roused all my contempt.

Oh, that I should bear the name of a craven!

Lady Grenellen was also in London. When he was sober enough and not engaged with his military duties, Augustus went to see her, and if she happened to be un-

kind to him he vented his annoyance upon me on his return.

Had it not been that he was going to the war I could not, for my own self-respect, have put up with the position any longer. But that thought, and the sight of his weeping mother, made me bear all things in silence. I could not add to her griefs.

She quite broke down one day.

"I always knew Gussie took too much. It began at Cambridge, long ago," she wept. "But after he first saw you and fell in love, he gave it up, I hoped, and now it has broken out again. I thought marrying you would have cured him. Oh, deary me! I feared some one would tell your grandma, and she would break off the match. I was glad when your wedding was over." And she sobbed and rocked herself to and fro. "I'm grateful to you, my dear, for what you have done for him. It's been ugly for you lately. But there—there, he's going to the war and I shall never see him again!"

"Do not take that gloomy view. The war is nearly over. There is no danger now," I said, to comfort her. "Augustus will only have riding about and a healthy outdoor life, and it will probably cure him."

"I've lived in fear ever since the war began, and now it's come," she wailed, refusing to be comforted.

I said everything else I could, and eventually she cheered up for a few days after this, but at the end broke down again, and now, Amelia writes, lies prostrate in a darkened room. Amelia is having her time of trial. They left for Bournemouth yesterday.

Am I a cold and heartless woman because now that Augustus has gone I can only feel relief?

One of his last speeches was not calculated to leave an agreeable impression.

"You'd better look out how you behave while I am away," he said. "I'd kick up a row in a minute, only you're such a lump of ice no man would bother with you." Then, in a passion: "I wish to God they would, and take you off, so I could get some one of more use to me!" He was surprised that I did not wish him to kiss me ten minutes after this.

And now he has gone, and for six months, at any rate, I shall be free from his companionship.

When he returns things shall be started on a different footing.

I came down to Ledstone by myself yesterday. I have no plans. Perhaps I shall stay here until Christmas, when I am to go to Bournemouth to my mother-in-law.

The house seems more than ever big and hideously oppressive. I must find some interest. The old numbness has returned with double force. I take up a book and put it down again. I roam from one room to another. I am restless and rebellious—rebellious with fate.

I know grandmamma would be angry with me could she come back to me now. She would say I was behaving with the want of self-control of a common person, and not as one of our race. Well, perhaps she is right. I shall go to the cottage and see Hephzibah and give myself a shock. That may do me good.

I never willingly let myself think of Antony, but unconsciously my thoughts are always turning back to the evening in the fog. I do not know where he is. He may be at Dane Mount, only these few miles off, and yet we must not meet.

I wonder if Ambrosine Eustasie de Calincourt had ever a lover. Probably—and she would have listened to him, being of her time.

Oh, what is this quality in me that makes me as I am—a flabby thing, with strength enough to push away all I desire in life, to keep untarnished my idea of honor, and yet too weak to tear the matter from my mind once I have done so?

How grandmamma would despise me!

I think of the Princess's answer to the riddle of the nineteenth day in *A Digit of the Moon.* I am this middle thing, and it is only the very bad and very good that achieve peace and perfect happiness.

"Come, Roy, away with us! Let us run, as we used to do last year when we were young. Let us shake ourselves and laugh. No more of this unworthy repining! There are some in the world that have but one eye, and some but one leg, and they cannot see or run, and are worse off than we are, my friend. So think of that, and don't lift your lip at me, and tell me it is cold, and you want to stay by the fire."

All the blinds were down in the front of the cottage as I unlatched the garden gate—the gate I had passed through last following grandmamma's coffin to her grave. I ran round to the back door and soon found Hephzibah.

Her joy was great to see me there, her only regret being she had not known I was coming that she might have had the fires lit. They were all laid, and she soon put a match to them.

With what pride she showed me how she had kept everything! Then she left me alone, standing in the little drawing-room. It seemed so wonderfully small to me now. The pieces of brocade still hid the magenta "suite," but arranged with a prim stiffness they lacked in our day. Dear Hephzibah! She had been dusting them, and would not fold them up and put them away in case that I should ever come.

The china all stood as it used, and grandmamma's chair with her footstool, and the little table near it with her magnifying-glass and spectacle-case. There were her books, the old French classics, and the modern yellow backs, her paper-knife still in one, half-cut. I never realized how happy I had been here, in this little room, a year ago. How happy, and, oh, how ridiculously young! My work-box stood in its usual place, a bit of fine embroidery protruding from its lid.

For the first time in my life I sat down in grandmamma's chair. Oh, if something of her spirit could descend upon me! I tried to think of her maxims, her wonderful courage, her cheerfulness in all adversities, her wit, her gayety. I seemed a paltry, feeble creature daring to sit there, in her *bergère,* and sigh at fate. No, I would grumble no more. I, too, would be of the race.

How long I mused there I do not know. The fire was burning low.

I went up to my own old room. I must see everything, now I was here. It struck me with a freezing chill as I opened the door. The fire had not drawn here, and lay a mass of smouldering sticks and paper in the narrow grate.

There was my little white bed, cold and narrow. The dressing-table, with its muslin flounces and cheap, white-bordered mirror. Even the china tray was there, where, I remember, my jewels lay the night before my wedding, and close beside it, the red-morocco case Antony's present had come in—left behind, by mistake, I suppose, when the other gifts were packed away. The note he had written me with it was still in its lid.

The paper felt icy to touch. I pulled it out and read it to the end. Then I threw it in the fire. The sullen, charred sticks had not life enough to burn it. I lit a

match and watched the bright flames curl up the chimney until all was destroyed. Then I fled. Here at least in the cottage I will never come again. The room is full of ghosts.

On the whole, however, my visit did me good. I returned to Ledstone with a firm determination to be more like grandmamma.

A telegram was awaiting me from Augustus, sent from his first stopping-place. He had caught the measles, it appeared. The measles! I thought only children got the measles.

Poor Augustus! He would make a bad patient. I was truly sorry, and sent the most affectionate and sympathetic answer I could think of.

I wrote to the war office, asking them please to send me any further news when they received it. But the measles! It almost made me laugh.

CHAPTER II

Next day Lady Tilchester wrote and asked me to go to Harley. She had heard I was alone, and would be so delighted to have me for a week, she said.

I started two days afterwards. To see her would give me pleasure.

"How very white and thin you are looking, dear!" she said, as we sat together in her sitting-room the first afternoon I arrived. "You are not the same person as the very young girl who danced at the Yeomanry ball in May. How old are you, Ambrosine?"

"I was twenty in October."

"Twenty years old! Only twenty years old, and with that sad face! Nothing in life ought to make one sad at twenty. You look like a piteous child. I could imagine Muriel, with a dead bird, or a set of kittens to be drowned, looking as pathetic as you do."

"I know. I am ashamed of myself," I said. "Grandmamma would be so angry with me if she were here."

"Well, now we are going to cheer you up. The Duke is coming on Saturday. He is not married yet, you see."

"Oh, tell me how the affair went," I said, smiling. "It—it's—a month ago we were at Myrlton."

"The silly girl preferred Luffy, but for the last weeks they both were hanging on. Miss Trumpet and her aunt were staying at Claridge's, and they tell me it was too ridiculous! Luffy lunched with them every day, and Berty dined in the evening."

"You did not tell her about the Coronation, then?"

"Yes, I *did!* But just for once in a way she had fallen in love—Luffy *is* beautiful, you know!—and, my dear child, any girl or woman in love is the most unreasonable, absurd creature on the face of the earth."

"Yes, I know. But the Americans don't get in love like other nations. She assured me they knew how to keep men in their places on the other side of the Atlantic."

"But the 'place' of a man is doing exactly what the particular woman in the case wants him to do, don't forget that! And Miss Trumpet finally decided, last week, that she wanted him to be her husband."

"Poor Duke!" I said.

"Oh, I don't think Berty minds very much. Anyway, you will be able to console him."

"You have quite a mistaken idea there. He likes to talk about himself, and explain to me his views on morals and manners, but he is not the least interested in *me*. I am a very good listener, you know. Grandmamma never let me interrupt people."

"Poor old Berty!" she said. "He has the best heart underneath all his silly mannerisms. I have known him since he was a child. He is much older than he looks, almost my age, in fact."

"How has Lady Grenellen taken the engagement?" I asked.

"Cordelia? Oh, she is simply furious. It is the first time any other woman has ever had a chance with her. An English girl would have a rather blank prospect in front of her for the afterwards. But these Americans are so wonderfully clever and sensible, probably Luffy will remain Miss Trumpet's devoted slave for years."

Lord Tilchester entered the room, and said "How d'y

do," to me. He is a gruff, unattractive person. I do not know what Babykins sees in him.

He spent his time eating tea-cake and feeding the dogs, with a casual remark here and there. At last he left. I was glad. Lady Tilchester's manner to him is always gracious and complacent. She attends to his wishes, and talks to him without yawning. She must be my model for my future treating of Augustus. This is the most perfect and beautiful lady in the world, I think.

There were only a couple of men staying in the house besides myself until the Saturday, when a crowd of people came. In these few days I got to know Margaret Tilchester more intimately. Her beautiful nature would stand any test. All her real and intense interests are concentrated upon her schemes to benefit mankind, practical, sensible schemes, with no sentiment about them. I wish I could see her children. The boy is, of course, at Eton, and the little girl is again away, visiting her grandmother. There are dozens of photographs of them about, and the girl keeps reminding me of some one, I cannot fix who. She looks a dear little creature. Oh, I should love a baby! But still I shall always pray I may never have a child.

The Duke arrived with the other guests on Saturday. He looked just the same. His reverse of fortune had not altered his appearance. He seemed extremely glad to see me.

"You have heard how the affair went," he said to me the first night after dinner. "After keeping me in the most ridiculous position, dangling for weeks, she preferred Luffy."

"Yes, I heard."

"My only satisfaction out of the whole thing is that,

for once, Cordelia is paid out in her own coin. As a rule, she only cares to take away some one who belongs to some other woman, and now this little girl has turned the tables."

"How spiteful of you, when Lady Grenellen was trying to arrange for your future happiness!"

"Nothing of the kind. You don't know Cordelia. She is only afraid I shall shut up Myrlton, or let it, and she amuses herself a good deal there. She thought if I had a rich wife her opportunities would oftener occur. I can only keep it open in the autumn now."

"Oh, you are a wonderful company!" I laughed.

"I wish you were a widow. You would suit me in every way."

"Hush!" I said, frowning. "I do not like you to speak so, even in jest."

"But I always told you I loved you," he said, resignedly.

"Nonsense. What is this ridiculous love you all speak about? A silly passion that only wants what it cannot have, or, if it succeeds, immediately translates itself to some one else. You told me so yourself. You said at least you were not wearingly faithful—you, as a class."

"How you confute one with argument, lovely lady! I shall call you Portia. But what an adorable Portia!"

"Now, stop," I said, severely. "I would rather hear your views on morality and religion than the rubbish you are now talking."

"I have never been more snubbed in my life. Even Miss Corrisande K. Trumpet did not flatten me out as you do," he said, with feigned resentment.

"You told me in the beginning I looked unlike the Englishwomen. Well, I am unlike them. I am a person of bad nature. I refuse to be bored."

"And I bore you?"

"Only when you talk silly sentiment."

"Then it is a bargain. If I don't bore you, you will be friends with me?"

"And if you do—*bon soir, monsieur,*" and I rose, laughing, and joined my hostess.

The party this time was much nicer than the former one I came to. It was composed of clever, interesting people. The conversation was often brilliant and elevating. No one talked like Babykins or Lady Grenellen. In fact, it appeared another society altogether. It seemed impossible among these people to realize that perhaps, in reality, they are like the rest. There was not a word or a look which would suggest that they held any but the highest views.

Lady Tilchester shone among them. She seemed to be in a suitable setting. They were mostly of very high rank, and the rest politicians and diplomats. They did not clip their sentences and use pet words, and they did not smoke cigarettes all the time.

The women, although not nearly so well dressed or attractive to look at, were much more agreeable to one another, and one was a perfectly wonderful musician. Her playing delighted us all. She played the things of Grieg that I played to Antony on the evening at Dane Mount. I sat by myself and listened. I seemed to see his face and hear his voice, but the good resolutions I had made while sitting in grandmamma's chair helped me to put these thoughts away.

I felt more at rest, at peace, here. Every one's life seemed full of interest—interest in something great. I would like this society best if I had to choose which I would frequent, but I can realize that people as good as these, but duller and less brilliant, would make one look at the clock.

Perhaps Lady Tilchester's plan of having every sort at her house is the best, after all. Then she can have variety and never be bored.

I wonder if it is the occupation of their minds with great things, in this set, which balances with the "lives of compulsion" led by the middle classes, and so prevents them also from "getting back to nature," as the Duke said.

It is an interesting problem.

Mr. Budge sat down and talked to me. He has a very strong character, I am sure, and I was flattered that he should think me worth speaking to.

"I admire your perfect stillness," he said at last, after there had been a pause of a moment or two. "I have never seen a woman sit so still. It is a great quality."

"I was not allowed to fidget when I was young," I said. "Perhaps one acquires repose as a habit."

"When you were young! Why, you look only a baby now! I would take you for about eighteen years old, and that is what interests me. Your eyes have a question and a story in them that is not usual at eighteen."

"Oh, I am ever so much older than that! I must be at least fifty!" I said.

He smiled. "I am fifty. It is a terrible age."

"I dare say it would be nice to be fifty if one had been long enough young—to get there gradually. But to jump there, that is what is not amusing."

"And you have jumped to fifty? I thought there was a story in those Sphinx eyes."

"Why do you say that? You are the second person who has said I have the eyes of the Sphinx. I would like to know why?" I asked.

"Because they are inscrutable. They suggest much

and reveal nothing. It would interest me deeply to hear your impression of things."

"What things?"

"The world, the flesh, or the devil—anything that would make you lift the curtain a little. For instance, what do you think of this society here now?"

"They all seem to be clever people with interests in life."

"Most people have interests in life. The candle would soon burn out otherwise. What are yours, if I may ask?"

"I am observing. I have not decided yet what interests me. I would like to travel, I think, and see the world."

"That is an easy matter at your age. But have you no other desires?"

"No, unless it would be to sleep very soundly and enjoy my food."

"What a little cynic! A gross little materialist! And you look the embodiment of etherealism."

"At fifty I have always understood creature comforts begin to matter more. Each age has its pleasures."

He laughed.

"Tell me something else about the emotions of the fifty-year-olds."

"They get up in the morning and they wonder if it will rain, and, if they are in England, it often answers them by pouring. Then they breakfast, and wonder if they will read or play the piano or walk, or if it matters a scrap if they do none of these things, and presently they look at the papers, and they see the war is going on still, and people are being killed, and they wonder to what end. And they read that the opposition is accusing the government of all sorts of crimes and negligences, and

they remember that is the fate of governments, whichever side is in. And then they lunch, perhaps, and see friends. And they find they want some one else's husband but their own, and that the husband, perhaps, only cares for sport, or some one else's wife. And then they sleep after lunch, and drive, and have tea, and read books about philosophy, and dine, and yawn, and finally go to bed."

"What a terrible picture! And when they were young what did they do?"

"It is so long ago I heard of that, but I will try to remember. They woke feeling the day was a glorious thing in front of them, that even if they were in England, and it was raining, the sun would soon come out. And they sang while they dressed, and, if it was summer, they rushed round the garden, and loved all the flowers, and the scent in the air, and the beauty of the lights and colors, and the dear little butterflies. And they saw the shades on the trees, and they heard the different notes in the birds' songs. And they were hungry, and glad to eat bread and milk. And every goose was a swan, and every moment full of joy, because they said to themselves, 'Something glorious is coming to me, also, in this most glorious world!'"

I laughed softly. It seemed so true, and so long ago.

Mr. Budge looked at me. His face was grave and puzzled.

"Child," he said, "it grieves me to hear you talk so. I assure you, I, who am really fifty, still enjoy all those things that you say only the very young can appreciate."

"We have changed places, then!" I answered, lightly. "And I see Lady Tilchester making a move towards bed. That is a delightful place, where fifty and fifteen can both enjoy oblivion—so good-night!" And I smiled at

him over my shoulder as I walked towards the door!

Next day, after church, the Duke and I went for a walk. He kept his promise and did not bore me. We discussed all sorts of things, some interesting, and all in the abstract. We left personalities alone. At last he said:

"Until the beginning of the nineteenth century things went along gradually. People could look ahead for a hundred years and say, with something like certainty, what would be likely to take place. But since then everything has gone with such leaps and bounds that no one could prophesy! Though in five hundred years we shall probably be a wretched republic, constructed out of the débris of the old order, and the Americans will be an aristocratic nation with a king."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because when companies of people get sufficiently rich not to have to work they grow to like whatever will appeal to their vanity and self-importance. There is a halo round a title, and you can leave it to your children. A king becomes a necessity then."

"An American king! It does seem a strange idea. Well, we shall not be there to see, so it does not matter to us. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'"

"History always repeats itself. Look at the Romans, a civilized republic, and then they must have an emperor."

"And then the barbarians came and the whole thing was blotted out. And so in the end, *à quoi bon?* No one was ever benefited."

"But the world would not go on if we said *'à quoi bon'* to everything. The fortunate thing is that for the time we think things matter immensely. When people begin to feel nothing matters at all, it is because their livers are out of order. And when a nation becomes apathetic,

that is what is the matter too. Look at Italy or Spain! Their livers are completely out of order. All their institutions are jaundiced and each country is going downhill."

"Poor Spain and Italy!" I said, and I laughed.

"I like to hear you laugh, I don't care what it is about," said the Duke.

"I believe if I had your great position and traditions of family I should try to be a strong influence in the country. I would try to make a name for myself in history," I said. "I would not be contented with being just a duke."

"Ah, if I had you always near me perhaps I should," and he sighed pathetically.

"Now, now! you are breaking your bargain, and talking personally, which will bore me."

"But you began it. I was quietly discussing something—the evolution of the world, I think—when you gave me your opinion of what you would do in my case."

I laughed.

"Yes, but I am permitted to be illogical, not being a man, and I am thinking it might cause me an interest if I had your case."

"I will tell you what my grandfather, the tenth Duke, said to me when he was a very old man—you know his record, of course? He was one of the greatest politicians and *litterateurs* of his time, but had been in the Guards when a boy, and at sixteen fought at Waterloo. 'After having tasted the best of most things in life, Robert,' he said, 'I can tell you there are only two things really worth having—women and fighting.'"

CHAPTER III

Before the end of my visit to Harley the Duke and I became fast friends, and while not possessing Antony's lightness of wit or personal attractions, he is an agreeable companion and out of the ordinary run of young men. He promised me, as we said good-bye, that he would think of my words, and try to do something with his life to deserve my good opinion.

"Come here whenever you are lonely, dear child," said my beautiful hostess, as we parted. "We delight in having you, and you must not mope at home all by yourself."

The roads were too bad for the automobile, so I drove back to Ledstone in my victoria. It was a brilliant, frosty day, the 11th of December. Something in the air sent my spirits up. I felt if Mr. Budge had only been with me I could have told him I was growing younger. My first interest when I got home should be to alter my boudoir. Augustus had left me fairly provided with money, and I could, at all events, run up what bills I pleased. That thought brought me back to the last bill I had tried to incur.

What had been the result of my orders? Would the shop-people have told Lady Grenellen that a strange lady had sent her the tea-gowns? Would she have wondered about them and made inquiries? I had heard nothing further. I dismissed the subject and returned to my boudoir. I was just thinking deeply what change I should make as we drove up the avenue. Should I take

away the mustard walls and do the whole thing white, or have it pale green, or what? Then we caught up a telegraph-boy. He handed me the orange envelope.

It was from the war office, and ran:

"We are deeply grieved to inform you intelligence has been received that your husband, Lieutenant Augustus Gurrage, of the Tilchester Yeomanry, died of measles on board the troop-ship *Aurora* on the 6th instant."

The sky suddenly became dark, and I remember nothing more until I found myself in the hall with a crowd of servants round me. For the first time in my life I had fainted. I shall not analyze my feelings at this time. The principal emotions were horror and shock.

Oh, poor Augustus! to have died all alone at sea! Oh, I did, indeed, grieve for him! And the measles, which I had almost laughed at! The measles to have killed him! Afterwards, when we heard the details, it appeared his constitution was so weakened with the quantity of alcohol he had taken in those last three weeks that he had no strength to stand against the attack.

My one thought was for his poor mother. A telegram had gone to her, too, it appeared.

I left for Bournemouth by the first train I could catch, but when I arrived I was met by a doctor. Mrs. Gurrage had lost her reason, he told me, upon hearing the news. She had been weak and ailing and in bed ever since her return from London, and this had proved the last straw, and now she lay, a childish imbecile, in her gorgeous bedroom up-stairs.

Oh, I can never write the horrors poor Amelia and I went through for the next ten days. The sadness of it all! My poor mother-in-law did not recognize me. She

talked incessantly of Augustus. She seemed quite happy. He was a boy again to her—sometimes an infant, and at others almost grown up.

Once or twice she asked Amelia if I was not the new tenant at the cottage.

"She's a pretty girl," she said, "and Gussie's wonderful took with her."

Her poor voice had gone back to the sound and pronunciation of her early youth. Sometimes her accent was so broad and her expression so unusual that I could hardly understand her.

They had buried Augustus at sea. A grand and glorious grave, I think.

By the beginning of the new year I found myself a very rich woman. Augustus had left me his fortune, to be divided with his mother, should she survive him, and if not, to go to me and any possible children we might have. The will had been made directly we returned to Ledstone after our wedding.

Amelia received only a very small legacy.

Towards the end of January there was a change in the poor invalid up-stairs. My presence began to awake some memories. She was unhappy, and pointed at me. I disturbed and distressed her. It grieved me. I would so willingly have stayed and nursed her, but the doctors absolutely forbade my ever going into her room.

We had all the greatest specialists down from London to consult about her case, but they all shook their heads. It seemed hopeless and most unlikely she would ever recover her reason.

One great physician said to me, with truth:

"For the poor lady's sake I could almost hope she will remain in her present state. She is happy and quite

harmless, whereas she would suffer agonies of grief should she recover."

I tried to take this view, and after making every possible arrangement for her comfort and attendance I left for London. There was a great deal of business to be seen about in connection with the will.

Lady Tilchester had telegraphed at once all her sympathy, and I got numbers of letters from all sorts of people.

Among them Lady Grenellen! A beautifully expressed note, full of the friendliest sympathy.

When I got back to Ledstone, after my week in London, I found quantities of letters and bills had accumulated for Augustus. His lawyers were coming down the next day to sort and settle everything. They had been piled up in the smoking-room.

I sadly glanced through them as they lay. Oh, I am not a hypocrite to say that when I first went back into this room, full of tipsy horrors as its associations were, it brought Augustus back so vividly that I sat down and cried.

I had never wished him ill, and would have given him back his life if I could. To die so young, with everything to make existence fair! It seemed too sad.

I lifted the pile of papers, one after another, and at last came upon one with the address printed on the outside of the envelope—the address of the dressmaker where Lady Grenellen's clothes came from.

This bill the lawyers should not see. I looked carefully to the end of the pile. There were no more of any consequence. I wished I could find her letters too, to save them also. The drawers were all locked. I could not think that night what to do, but when the lawyers came next day I asked them to give me any letters they

might find with the same writing on the envelope as the one I showed them—her note of sympathy to me—and not to examine them.

And so it was that a day or two afterwards I had before me six letters with a gold coronet emblazoned upon the envelopes.

I had paid the bill. I wrote the check and despatched it the night I found it, and now the receipt also lay beside the letters. I tied them together and sealed the bundle with Augustus's seal. I put the receipted bill with them, and enclosed the whole packet in another envelope, and addressed it to Lady Grenellen.

I had not answered her letter of sympathy. This would be my answer.

A thick skin is a fortunate gift, it appears, and one I had thought of extreme rareness in the class to which she belongs. What was my surprise to receive a gushing letter of thanks by return of post! My husband and she had been such friends, she said, and he had helped her before so kindly out of her difficulties, and it was too good of me to have paid this bill—she could see by the date I must have paid it—and it all was too sad, and she hoped we should meet later on, perhaps at Harley! Her own husband was coming home, slightly wounded, she added.

Had I been in a laughing mood I should have laughed aloud at the effrontery of the whole thing. Well, perhaps it was better so. As far as I am concerned the whole incident shall be forgotten—a memory of Augustus sunk into the past.

And so January passed and February began.

It seems in life that things all come together. One's days go on smoothly, uneventfully, for months, and then, one after another, a series of startling, unusual events

occurs, which changes the course of the peaceful river.

At the end of February—I was still at Ledstone, and my daily communications from Amelia told me my poor mother-in-law was still a happy idiot—another telegram came to me—this time it was addressed to grandmamma—to grandmamma at the cottage! The very outside startled me.

It was long, and from an unknown firm of lawyers in America, to say that papa had died out in the West, leaving me and grandmamma a perfectly colossal fortune—all made in the space of three years, it must have been.

I seemed past feeling any grief. Papa was a shadow, a strange flash in my life for so long a time now.

I was perfectly unacquainted with business, and had no more idea than a child what I should have to do about this. I wished I had a friend to advise me. Where could I turn? I thought of Antony. For the first time since my widowhood I let my thoughts turn to him. He would give me any advice I wanted, but then—no, he had had the good taste never even to write to me. There was time enough for our meeting. I would not push fate—I, who had been a widow only two months.

The only thing there seemed for me to do was to start for America immediately, and, after taking paid advice—one gets very good advice by paying for it—Roy, McGreggor, my lawyer, and I left England one cold and bleak March morning.

CHAPTER IV

As my trip to America was one of business entirely, and was unaccompanied by any interesting incidents or adventures, I have let it pass by in silence. I was too busy all the time, and too lonely, to take many fresh impressions. It seemed hurry and rush, continuous noises, and tension of the nerves. I felt glad when I once more found myself on board the great liner that was taking me to England.

It was fortunately a fine passage, not even really cold at the end of May. Just over a year ago since I was a very young girl, wondering what life had in store for me, and in twelve months a whole chapter of events and sensations had passed. I seemed to know the whole string of emotions—or so I thought.

I had my deck-chair put where I could watch the waves receding as the great ship cut her way through them.

The salt air seemed to bring fresh life to me—fresh life and fresh ideas. Two things were certain—first, that I was now much too rich for one woman, and Amelia, who had tasted nothing but the rough bits of life, was much too poor after her long service.

A scheme had come into my head in these months alone.

My mother-in-law was still an imbecile, happy and contented. She was surrounded with nurses and all the attention that money and affection could buy. Why should not poor Amelia get some pleasure out of life?

I had a feeling that I, too, meant to live when the period of my mourning should be over; and how glorious to live and to forget that I had ever even had the name of Gurrage! I would give the whole of Augustus's fortune to Amelia; then she would gain by it, and I, too, would have the satisfaction of feeling that my marriage was an episode, a year to be blotted out of my life.

This thought would never have come if Mrs. Gurrage had not passed into another sphere of mental living. I would not have wounded her for the world.

I settled all the details in my mind, on my voyage home, and no sooner got to London than I executed them. The law is a slow and delaying business, and even a deed of gift requires endless formalities to go through.

Amelia was overcome. Her gratitude was speechless some days, and at others broke into torrents of words.

"I can have aunt to live with me back in the dear old home," she said, once.

To Amelia the crimson-satin boudoir, and the negro figures, and the bears, and the stained-glass window are all household gods, and far be it from me to wish to disillusionize her.

And I? I can take my household gods to a more congenial setting, perhaps. Who can tell? With the summer coming on and the birds singing it would be useless for me to pretend to grieve any more. A joy lives always in my heart. Some day—not too soon, but some day—I shall see Antony.

I shall never hurry matters. If he cares for me as deeply as I once thought, he will write to me soon or make some sign. Meanwhile—oh, I am free! Free and rich and young again! The shadows are fading away.

Grandmamma was right.

"Remember, above all things, that life is full of compensations."

Dear grandmamma! I wish you could come back to enjoy this second youth with me.

Shall I travel? It is late June now. Shall I go and see the world, or shall I wait, and perhaps, later on, have a companion to see it with me?

To avoid the Coronation festivities, when all details about my transfer of Augustus's property to Amelia were finished, I went over to France. I should stop at Versailles for a month and see the Marquis in Paris, and then, perhaps, go back to the cottage.

I had often heard from Lady Tilchester—charming, sympathetic, feminine letters. I must come to them at Harley whenever I decided to go out a little, she said. I felt the whole of the world was opening fairly for me.

I stopped a day or two in Paris to do a little shopping on my way to Versailles, and coming down the steps at Ritz one day I met Mr. Budge. He had come over for a breath of gayer air, he told me.

"You are looking wonderfully well," he said, "and not quite fifty years old now."

"I am hardly more than thirty," I informed him, "and hope, if the weather keeps fine, to grow a little younger still."

He said he was glad to hear it, and prayed I would let him come and see the process.

"One grows in the night, when one is asleep," I said, "so no one can see it. But if you would care to take tea with me in the afternoon, I shall be very pleased to see you."

He came the next day.

We talked gravely, as was befitting my mourning. He gave me news of my friends at Harley.

Lady Tilchester, he said, had a new scheme on hand for the employment of the returning volunteers whose places in business had been filled up in their absence. She was absorbed in this undertaking, but when not too busy was more charming than ever.

"I spent a Sunday at Harley a couple of weeks ago," he said. "I don't think many of the people were there that you met before—none, I believe, but Sir Antony Thornhirst."

"And how was he?" I tried to say as naturally as possible.

"He seemed in the best of health and spirits. There is an intelligent person, if you like. I wish he would enter Parliament."

"But Sir Antony is a Tory, I understand, Mr. Budge! He would be no use to you," I said.

"Yes, indeed, he would. We want some brilliancy just now in the House to wake us up. It does not matter which side it comes from."

"Don't you think he is too casual to care enough about it? He would not give himself the trouble to enter Parliament, I believe."

"That is just it. The ablest people are so lazy. Lady Tilchester has often tried to persuade him, but he has some whimsical answer ready, and remains at large."

I should like to have talked much more on this subject, but Mr. Budge changed the conversation. He drifted into saying some personal things which did not quite please me, considering my mourning. They were not in perfect taste. I remembered how in the beginning I had not liked his hands. One's first instincts are generally right. When he had gone I said to myself I should not care to see him any more.

In Paris one finds a hundred things to do and to buy if

one happens suddenly to have become a rich widow, as is my case. My few days stretched themselves into a week.

I had a letter from the Marquis de Rochermont. He was returning to his tiny apartments in the Rue de Varennes the following day, he told me.

He would lunch with me with pleasure, he said, and at one next day arrived in my sitting-room. He looked just as he used to do at first, but soon I noticed his gayety was gone. He seemed frail and older. He had deeply grieved for grandmamma.

His conversation was much the same, however. We spoke English as usual. I had grown, he said, into the most beautiful woman he had ever seen in his life, and my air and my dignity were worthy of the *ancien régime*. I had found, he hoped, that his *conseils* had been of some use to me in my brief married life.

"Yes, Marquis," I said, "I have often been grateful to you and grandmamma."

"You are of a great *richesse* now, *n'est-ce pas, mon enfant?*"

"Yes, of a great *richesse*. And so I have given all the Gurrage money back to one of their family—you may remember her—Amelia Hoad was her name."

"Ah!" he said, and he kissed my hand. "That was worthy of you and worthy of your race. It would have pleased our dear madam."

We had a delightful luncheon, in spite of my poor old guest's infirmities; he had grown blinder and more tottering since last we met. He ate very little and sipped his sparkling hock.

I had determined somehow to try and give him some of my great wealth; but how even to broach the subject I did not know. At last, driven into a corner with nervousness, I blurted out my wishes.

"Oh, I want you to benefit too, dear friend!" I said. "You shared our poverty, why not my riches?"

His old, faded cheeks turned pink. He rose from his chair.

"I thank you, madam," he said, haughtily. "The de Rochermonts do not accept money from women."

I felt as I used to when grandmamma was ever displeased with me. My knees shook.

"Oh, please forgive me!" I implored. "I have always looked upon myself as almost your child, although we are no relations, dear Marquis, and I thought——"

"Assez, assez, mon enfant," he said, and he resumed his chair. "You meant it *gentiment,* but it was a *bêtise quand même.* We shall speak of it no more."

Before he left he gave me some more *conseils.*

"You took no *amant,* child? No? Well, perhaps in England it was as well. But now listen to me. Be in no hurry *de predre un second mari.* The *agréments* of life are at their beginnings for you. All doors fly open to a *jeune et belle veuve. Amusez-vous bien."*

I looked at him. We were such old friends, I could speak to him.

"Even if one loved some one very much, Marquis?" I asked.

"On ne sait jamais combien de temps cela va durer, l'amour à vingt ans! C'est dangereux!" And he shook his head. Then, with an air of illumination, "It is your kinsman, Sir Thornhirst?" he said.

"Yes."

"And you love him very much?"

"I think so."

"In all cases wait—*attendez—surtout—point trop de hâte!"*

CHAPTER V

Versailles for me is always full of charms. There is a dignity about it which reminds me of grandmamma. I love to walk in the galleries and look at the portraits of the great ladies of the past. The gay *insouciance* of their expressions, the daintiness of their poses, the beautiful and suitable color of everything give me a sense of satisfaction and repose.

I had been there for some little while, spending days of peace and reflection, when, nearly eight months after the death of Augustus, I received two letters.

It was a most curious coincidence that neither of my correspondents had written to me before, even letters of condolence, and that they should select the same date now.

The letters were from Antony and the Duke. They were both characteristic.

"Comtesse," Antony wrote, "you know I am thinking of you always. When may I come and see you, and where?"

The Duke's was longer. It began conventionally, and went on in delicate language to tell me that time was passing, and surely soon I must be thinking of seeing my friends again, and he was entirely at my disposition when I should return to England.

This amused me. Antony's caused me a wave of joy. Oh! should I be able to take the Marquis's advice and wait for several years? I feared not.

Of course, I should not think of marrying Antony

yet. It would be absolutely indecent haste. Certainly not for eighteen months or two years, anyway. But there could be no harm in my seeing him soon.

Excitement tingled to my very finger-tips at the thought. I did not answer either letter for nearly a week. I walked about the gardens at Versailles and luxuriously enjoyed my musings.

I was, as it were, a cat playing with a mouse, only I was both cat and mouse.

One day I would picture our meeting—Antony's and mine. The next I would push him away from my thoughts, and decide that I would not even let him come to me until the year was up. Then, again, when it grew evening, and the darkness gradually crept up, there came a scent in the air which affected me so that I longed to see him at once—to see him—to let him kiss me. Oh, to myself I hardly dared to think of this!

The kisses of Augustus were, as yet, the only ones I knew.

At last I wrote my answers.

To the Duke I said my plans were uncertain. I did not know when I should return to England; probably not at all until next year, as I thought of going to Egypt for the winter. I finished with some pleasant platitudes.

Antony's answer took longer to write, and was only a few words when finished.

"I am staying at Versailles," I wrote. "If you like to come and see me casually—to talk about the ancestors —you may; but not for a week."

Why I made this stipulation of a week I do not know. Directly I had posted the letter I felt the time could never pass. It was with the greatest difficulty I prevented myself from sending a telegram of three words: "Come now. To-day." How would he find me looking?

Would he, too, think I had improved in appearance? I had grown an inch, it seemed to me. I was never very short, but now, at five feet seven, he could not call me "little Comtesse" any more. Oh, to hear his dear voice! To look into his greeny-blue, beautiful eyes! Oh, I fear no advice in the world of a hundred marquises could keep me from Antony much longer!

Would Wednesday never come?

Should I be out, and leave a message for him to follow me into the gardens, or should I quietly stay in my sitting-room? What should we say to each other? I must be very calm, of course, and appear perfectly indifferent, and we must not speak upon any subjects but the pictures here, and our mutual friends, and the pleasure of Paris, and the health of the dogs.

He had replied, immediately:

"I shall be there, and we can talk of the ancestors—and other things." No, there must be no "other things" yet.

But what immense joy all this was to think about for me! I who had never in all my life been able to do as I pleased. Now I would nibble at my cake and enjoy its every crumb—not seize and eat it all at once.

On Tuesday morning I got a telegram from Lady Tilchester, sent from Paris. I had written to her some days before. She had run over to Ritz for a week, she said, to recover from her fatigues of the Saturday, and would I come into town, and lunch with her that day at half-past twelve?

With delight I started in my automobile. I had not seen her for months.

"Oh, you beautiful thing!" she exclaimed, when we met. "I have never seen such a change in any one. You

are like an opening rose—a glorious, fresh flower."

She looked tired, I thought, but fascinating as ever. We lunched together in the restaurant, and had a long conversation.

After lunch we went up to the sitting-room. I meant to stay for half an hour before going back to Versailles.

Telegrams called Lady Tilchester away for a little. She is always so full of business.

"I shall send Muriel to entertain you while I answer these," she said. "I brought her over with me to have a glimpse of Paris, too."

In a few moments the sound of feet running down the passage caused me to turn round as the door opened and a slender child of ten or eleven entered the room. She was facing the light. I happened to be standing with my back to the window.

"How do you do?" she said, sweetly, and put out her little hand. "Mother says I may come and talk to you."

There are some moments in life too anguishing for words!

Her face is the face of Lady Tilchester, but her eyes —her eyes are grayish-greeny-blue, with black edges, and that look like a cat's, that can see in the dark.

Now I know of whom her photograph reminded me.

There can be only one other pair of such eyes in the world.

I don't remember what I said. Something kind and banal. Then I invented an excuse to go away.

"Give my best love to your mother, dear," I said, "and say I must not stop another moment. I have remembered an important appointment with the dressmaker, and I must fly!"

She put up her *mignonne* oval face to kiss me.

"I have heard so much of you," she said. "I wanted so to see you. I wish you could have stayed." And so we kissed and parted.

When I got into the automobile outside, I felt as if I were going to faint for a few awful moments. Everything was clear to me now! I remembered the little photograph on his mantelpiece, his sudden changing of the conversation, a number of small things unnoticed at the time. How had I been so ridiculously blind? It was because she seemed so great and noble, and utterly apart from all these things.

Had it been Babykins or Lady Grenellen, or any other woman, this discovery would have made no difference to me. I did not doubt that Antony loved me, and me only, now. He had been "not wearyingly faithful," like the rest of his world, that was all.

But she—Lady Tilchester—my friend! Oh, I could not take her lover from her! She who had always been so good to me, from the first moment of our acquaintance, kind and sympathetic and dear! I owed her deepest gratitude. If one of us must suffer, it should certainly be I. I could not play her false like this. Of course she loved him still! He was often with her, I knew, and her face had softened when first she spoke of him. They had known each other for fourteen years, she had said. I seemed to see it all. This was her "mid-summer madness," and Antony had gone away to travel for several years, and then returned to her again. They had probably been so happy together until I came upon the scene.

Well, they can be happy once more when he forgets me. I, at least, shall not stand in the way. Dear Margaret, I am not so mean as that! You shall keep your lover, and I will never have mine!

All my life I shall hate the road to Versailles. "Go at top speed," I told my chauffeur.

I felt if we might dash against a tree and have done with the whole matter, it would be the best thing in the end.

The rapid motion through the air revived me. I had my wits about me when we drew up at the hotel door.

"I am going to Switzerland to-night," I said to McGreggor. "Pack up everything."

She is a maid of wonderful sense.

"Very well, ma'am," she said, without the slightest appearance of surprise.

I sat down and wrote a telegram to Antony. It would just catch him. He was to leave by the night mail:

"I have seen Muriel and I know. Lady Tilchester has been always kind to me. Do not come. Good-bye."

Then I took it to the post-office myself.

That night we left for Lucerne—McGreggor and Roy and I.

CHAPTER VI

It being August, crowds of tourists faced me everywhere. Lucerne, which I have always heard was such a pretty place, filled me with loathing. I stayed only a day there. At last, after stopping in several places, we arrived one afternoon at Zuïebad. Here, at least, there were no tourists, only ugly rheumatic invalids, and unattractive. What made me choose such a place I do not know, unless it was because I happened to see the name printed large upon the map. Any place would do. I had not felt much in my rapid rush. A numbness, as of a limb cut off, an utter indifference to everything in life.

But when I found myself alone in the vast pine-woods, an anguish, as of physical pain, took possession of me. Every tree spoke to me of Antony. The surroundings were all perfect.

What would he do? Would he follow me and try to persuade me to alter my mind? Oh, no, he could never do that. He would know that this must be final. What had been his idea all along? How could he think I should never find out, and having done so, that I would ever accept such a position?

Or was it that he, like all his world, thought so lightly of passing from one love to another that fidelity to Lady Tilchester was among the catalogue of things that do not count.

I had taken no pains to hide my whereabouts.

At each hotel they would know to where I had gone on. For days a feverish excitement took possession of me.

Every knock at the door made me start. Would he write? Would he make any sign? I almost prayed not, and yet I feared and longed to hear from him.

This is not a school-girl love story I am writing, but the chronicle of my life. I have always despised sentimental heart-burnings, and when I used to read of the heroine dying for love, it always made me laugh. But, oh, never again can I know such bitterness in life as I have suffered in this black week—to have been so near to bliss, and now to be away forever!

What good to me were my freedom and riches? As well be married or dead. I never knew before how much I had been looking forward to seeing Antony again. I never realized how, instinctively, for months my soul had been living in the background on this thought.

And now it was all finished. I must not be a coward. Oh, how I wished again for grandmamma's spirit! This time I must tear the whole thing out of my life at once.

To go on caring for another woman's lover was beneath contempt.

When I should have recovered a little, I would go back to England and mix with the world, and gradually forget, and eventually marry the Duke. Fortunately, as the Marquis said, *à vingt ans* one could never be sure of love lasting. So probably I should soon be cured, and there would be compensation in being an English duchess. It was a great position, as Miss Corrisande K. Trumpet had said. And all men make good enough husbands if you have control of the dollars, I remember she added.

Well, I should have control of the dollars. So we should see.

The Duke was a gentleman, too, and intelligent, agreeable, and had liberal views. His Duchess might eventually have a "friend," like the rest, he had said. So, no

doubt, I should be able to acquire the habit of thus amusing myself. Why should I hesitate, when the best and the noblest gave me examples?

All my ideas on those subjects had fallen to pieces like a pack of cards.

"'Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow you die.'"

Well, I had never eaten or drunk of happiness yet, and now my heart was dead. So what was the good of it all, anyway? *À quoi bon?* and again, *à quoi bon?* That is what the trees said to me when they tired of calling for Antony.

I breakfasted and lunched and dined and walked miles every day. I loathed my food. I hated the faces of the people who stared at me. I fear I even snapped at McGreggor. Roy was my only comfort.

But gradually the beauty and peace of the pine-forests soothed me. Better thoughts came. I said to myself: "Enough. Now you will go home and face life. At least you can try to do some good in the world, and with your great wealth make some poor creatures happy. You have behaved according to your own idea of gratitude and honor. No one asked you to do it; therefore, why sit there and growl at fate? Have courage to carry the thing through. No more contemptible repinings."

Far away up the hills there is a path that leads to an open space—a tiny peep out over the tree-tops, sheer precipices below. I would go there for the last time, and to-morrow return to England.

The climb was steep. I was a little out of breath, and leaned on the stone ledge to rest myself when I arrived at the top. I was quite alone.

The knife on my chatelaine caught in the lichen and

dragged at the chain. It angered me. I took it off the twisted ring and looked at it.

"Little 'ill omen,' as he called you, is it your fault that once fate, once honor, and once gratitude to a woman have kept me from my love? Well, I shall throw you away now, then I shall have no link left to remind me of foolish things that might have been."

I lifted my arm, and with all my might flung the tiny, glittering thing out into the air. It fell far away down among the tree-tops in the valley.

Then I turned to go down the hill. I had done with ridiculous sentiment, which I had always disliked and despised.

Footsteps were coming towards me up the long, winding path. It was a lonely place. I wished I had Roy with me. He had gone with McGreggor into the town.

A bend in the path hid the person from view until we met face to face.

And then I saw it was Antony, and it seemed as if my heart stopped beating.

"At last I have found you, Ambrosine, sweetheart!" he said, and he clasped me in his arms and kissed my lips.

Then I forgot Lady Tilchester and gratitude and honor and self-control, because in nature I find there is a stronger force than all these things, and that is the *touch* of the one we love.

It was perhaps an hour afterwards. The shadows looked blue among the pine-trees.

We sat on a little wooden bench. There was a warm, still silence. Not a twig moved. A joy so infinite seemed everywhere around.

"It was all over between us ten years ago," Antony

said. "It only lasted a year or two, when we were very young. The situation galled us both too much, and Tilchester was always my friend. She knows I love you, and she only cares for her great works and her fine position now. So you need not have fled, Comtesse."

"I shall tell you something, Antony," I whispered. "I am glad I am doing no wrong, but if it was to break Lady Tilchester's heart, if grandmamma were to come back and curse me here for forgetting all her teachings, if it was almost disgrace—now that I know what it is like to stay in your arms—I should stay!"

THE END

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